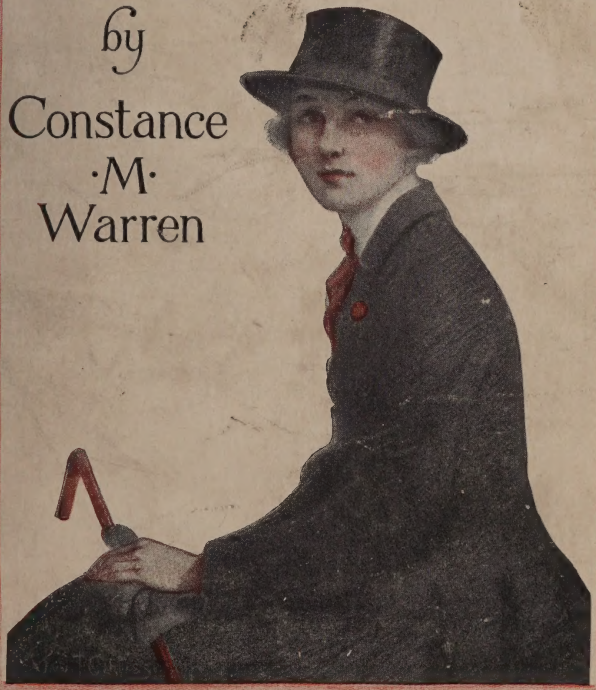
THE · PHŒNIX

by

Constance
·M·
Warren



THE PHŒNIX

BY

CONSTANCE M. WARREN

The scene of this engrossing novel is laid in Boston, — both in the Back Bay and in those other wards where the Back Bay goes slumming, — as well as in the smart summer colony at the North Shore. But it might equally well be laid in any other social center, so broadly true is its picture of American society.

With keen insight and dramatic feeling, the author tells the story of a girl, petted and unused to self-denial, who meets a great disappointment, makes a great mistake, all but succumbs to a great temptation, and at last finds the solution of her problem.

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THE PHŒNIX

CONSTANCE M WARREN

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The Phœnix



JANET

The Phœnix

By

Constance M. Warren

With frontispiece by
Christine Tucke Curtiss



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The Phœnix

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CHAPTER I

THE "Merry Widow" waltz was epidemic. A hurdy-gurdy, trundled along the Shore Road and into magnificent abutting precincts, disseminated it ruthlessly into the June air. The Italian in the harness, with eyes roving over promising windows, betrayed his malignance by jerks at the leash which had already scored his monkey's neck.

Janet Bulyon did not escape him. Her thoughts danced to his rhythm all the afternoon and later in the evening while she dressed.

"Bother it, Nonie! It's not my fault," she exclaimed for the frustrated efforts of her maid. "I'll be good now," she went on contritely.

Norah at forty seemed immeasurably venerable to her charge and the stern authority of her earlier status, through long years as nurse, still held dominion.

Janet, however, had but a dim idea of the solemn emotion behind that grimness. The occasion was the first, since the days of a struggling young couple and a raw young "general" girl, that a real "party" had been perpetrated. There had even been resent-

ment in this crude but ardent breast that in later years, when Augustus Bulyon was left alone with his daughter to enjoy prosperity, the unburied memory that still presided in the house was allowed to brood where gayety should have been. The entertainment of the evening was like a proclamation of emancipation. Cause enough, then, to worry — particularly about the set of that dress.

"These modeests ain't the time to sew things. There, look at that, — just basted!" cried Norah scornfully pulling a thread which did slip all the way through the seam. "Ain't that the shame? They've got the face. That's why you've got to put your mind on getting dressed."

Janet did stand still for a moment, but with the trembling rigidity of a horse that awaits the relaxation of the curb.

"You'll have me just as tired, Nonie, with all this tweaking and twitching, as if I'd never been a lamb and minded papa about lying down," she protested. "Tell you what, I'm getting bored with being an angel. There was the Means wedding, you know, this afternoon, — the most magnificent ever, as I suppose you've seen in the papers, — and there was Elizabeth Mills's dinner, — and I was just dying to have a dinner here, — every one does nowadays before a dance, — but I have to rest as if I were a baby-in-arms, — and papa puts his foot down like a *real old bear*."

The last words were articulated impressively.

Norah at first did not reply. She had a pin in her mouth. She was a believer in pins. She seemed not so anxious to remedy a gap as to find a gap to remedy.

"You can slang your pa all you've a mind to," she finally said. "Pas ain't a patch on husbands when it comes ter having their say-so."

Janet flushed. It was an extremely pretty flush, sudden and delicate and quickly gone.

"What do you know about husbands, Nonie?"

"Them as lives above the ground-floor often sees best what's transpising therein," was the oracular response.

But what *did* Nonie know about husbands?

When she had been dismissed with affection but dispatch, Janet, without reserve, executed before the long mirror the amorous, stimulating steps. She raised her left arm and crooked the elbow as if a partner were holding her. She extended her right arm adventurously. For a moment she imagined herself to be Lina Abarbanelle in the arms of Donald Brian. It had thrilled her to see the operetta in the spring. Then the thought of her own Donald who would soon be actually with her, holding her, came waltzing into her heart. She ended with a grimace for herself and the irrepressibility of her happiness.

Then there was a fan to be found. It was still the custom to carry them, — the generation had not quite reached the point where the heated face could

withstand scrutiny without that grateful agitation, that Oriental play of modesty. She had laid it down, somewhere, only just now, a delicate trinket with fragile ivory sticks and old-fashioned "applied" figures of powdered ladies with panniers and gallants in satin "smalls." The occasion had brought it from Aunt Esther, who never left Newburyport, — whence Augustus Bulyon had migrated to seek his fortune, — and who still shouldered the chief duties of that parish which had been disjointed years ago by their parson father's death. In one of those family connections which had dwindled to the vanishing point she formed a link for Janet, powerful if perhaps sentimental. It meant something real to carry that fan to-night.

The search led through the disordered drawers of the spindle-legged dressing-table, Sheraton to go with the rest of the room (the house having been left to a designer, the rooms were "period" rooms). She fumbled behind books laid carelessly down and incidentally sniffed of the first wild roses gathered that afternoon. She threw aside, now, with some impatience, the dressing-gown on the bed, preposterously expensive at the Maison Blanc, and then the cushions on the couch, covered with laborious crochet, and rummaged in fact all those pretty accessories of life which at present awaited Norah's systematizing hand.

It came to light at last under the photograph of Donald which he had brought a few weeks ago. Yet

she could not remember having taken the picture out from its hiding-place before this evening. But of course she must have. Of course she was always doing it. And she could not look at it ever, either, without recalling what an event the gift of it had been. She had wondered for such a long time why he had not offered it and then it was discovered that he had been waiting for her to ask. And when he had put it into her hand she had fled soon up here, fearing the declaration it practically made, deferring the delicious, dreaded hour.

Was that moratorium to end to-night? It was time that it should end. The youthful drifting of passion confessed yet not avowed had reached the point where one began to feel for the helm. It was the definite change of course that one trembled for, but obviously it must be adventured all the same.

She cast one more look at the disarranged but sacred virginal bower, and with a smile that was almost a sigh hurried from it, and out and down the polished staircase and across the great illuminated hall and through rooms adorned with flowers and cleared for dancing.

Her father stood idly before the fire in that small den of his purposely built at the end of things. It was the one room in the house with personality. There were worn, leather-covered chairs with deep seats that one could hardly rise from and scrolls in the oak of them turned out by an unpretentious lathe. He

had used the furniture at Dartmouth, and the walls also were adorned, between pictures of sailing-ships (which impassioned him), by stiff groups of boys of a generation already looking remote, arranged about footballs, or banners of societies, or holding their favorite bats in hand.

On the wall that faced the fireplace, and facing him, hung the portrait of a woman done in chalk. The medium had disintegrated, but shy, tender eyes looked down and masses of hair were coiled about the head.

When Janet came in he did not speak at first. His robust form, his rounded face surmounted with hair just brushed with white, curiously seemed to her exuberant expectation for a moment wraith-like. He seemed to bring his attention to her with difficulty even when she threw herself upon his breast. It was as if she had interrupted an interview. He shook himself, however, with a laugh, and it was plain from his eyes where his thoughts now centered.

"Darling," he protested, returning her fervent kiss, but seeming to pretend for his own discipline that this daughter of his was just an ordinary-looking daughter, "take care, — take care for my shirt-front!"

Janet refused to be rebuffed. She had become accustomed to his methods of reservation. She was conscious now of the pride in her which his habit tried to control.

"Shirt-fronts ought not to count to-night," she

said, continuing to caress him. "Daughters ought to come first on some occasions."

"Shirt-fronts are most perishable," Mr. Bulyon replied, smiling now at her joy.

"Sure about that? You don't know, papa; I've just been telling Norah that I don't intend to mind you forever — that I'm tired of being a saint."

"So this is rebellion, is it?" cried Mr. Bulyon, lighting a cigarette. "I have long feared this day."

But she was gone to the door. There was too much to anticipate to remain still.

"The musicians are here!" she exclaimed in a stage-whisper. "Billing has just let them in and they're tramping away to get fixed up. Gott always brings these little sawed-off Germans, with hob-nailed boots I should n't wonder, — right over the floor. Father!" — she turned excitedly. "When they begin to play, you'll *have* to dance with me. How empty the rooms look. Would n't it be queer if no one came? What could we say to the servants? And you and me just standing here together all the evening all dressed up."

"'And no place to go,'" quoted her father. — "Horrible! *One* I imagine, however, will come —"

As he saw her color rise his cheerfulness gave place to gravity and his glance strayed to the crayon on the wall.

"I fear," he remarked, hardly aloud, "that it may be I who'll do the standing about alone."

"Don't, father!" she protested. She was wondering, though, whether it were time to send for that bouquet which was swimming in the bathtub.

The first ring of the bell, resounding from the distance, brought her tripping to her toes again.

"Somebody's come!"

"Tootings on the avenue too!"

"People talking in the hall!"

Then the first strains of music broke the quiet. The flow of guests mysteriously started became as mysteriously a flood. Before she knew it, Janet was shaking numerous hands, and wondering if her flowers would spoil her dress.

In one of the dressing-rooms there was hilarity. The ushers from the Means-Dillingham wedding had, after intervening, hazy adventures, arrived in that torpedo-boat car of Charlie Bemis's, the terror of Harvard Square. And Percy Ethridge had become unmanageable. He wanted to sweep the surface of the table — where there were bottles of White Rock and rows of glasses — with his hand. He opened the faucets in the bathroom and stood guard when his friends protested. He wanted to make a mess somehow, to dip things into the mess and hurl them about.

"Signed the pledge against water, y' know," he reiterated, and giggled rather contagiously. In the night air his equilibrium had been respectable. Now

he inspired his companions with alarm and a sobering effect.

A friendly and elderly cousin tried to divert him with a question about the wedding. Percy concentrated of a sudden and draped his lanky person over the shoulder of Donald Craig.

"It was some show, believe me," he returned, nailing the cousin with his eye. "Wedding with all the fixings, was n't it, Don? Just read it up. Dillingham swagger 's a prince, the or'nary old guy." His tones became loud. "Expensive? Jewels — flowers — bishops — and oh! the fizz! Take it from me. Feather the nest." He shook his head, suddenly lugubrious. "But, oh, you Dillingham! Theodora Meanses don't grow on every bush."

The crowded room was now giving him its attention — tolerantly. Most of the men laughed. Most of them were youths — with a sprinkling of Mr. Bulyon's business friends. But all knew about weddings. And Percy was only finishing the Law School, and the Ethridges had weak heads.

One man, however, who had just divested himself of a light overcoat and was shaking his shoulders to get his dress-coat into place, now interposed.

"Is he capable of being furled?" he asked Donald, in tempered tones that had an edge and an amused air which excused but intensified them. The effect was to dissolve the inconvenient youth so that he melted off to other company.

The newcomer's eye twinkled. He seemed satisfied and turned to the mirror and straightened his tie and applied a brush to his hair, meanwhile engaging Donald in conversation on the flank, as it were.

"So you've really signed on with us, all except the actual signing?" he remarked, adjusting his strongly penciled eyebrows — a dandyfied touch, Donald thought.

Donald murmured the unnecessary affirmation, and suddenly felt rather awkward, rather unwieldy throughout his Herculean person in juxtaposition to this compact individual. His own amiable features and sandy-red hair looked pale in the reflection momentarily caught in contrast to the other's blackness.

"You hesitated, though?" insinuated Herman Duer, abruptly turning.

He was the young partner of Seeforth and Grafton who had found it paid to specialize in psychology. Things had changed in the conservative firm as a result of some of his researches. He had promulgated the doctrine that the inner man is more important to business than the outer man. He had played the iconoclast and was now face to face with another idol. If the firm habitually employed graduating athletes from the University he wanted to know why — not a college man himself. If this young man, with a scholarly record too, and from Technology as well, was whispered to be fastidious, a failing uncommon

In heroes, that also was something to examine — for business.

"We don't have many hesitate," said Duer.

"There were things to consider," Donald explained.

"Family, I suppose?"

"No, sir," Donald said simply, determined to keep his own counsel.

"Then break with the considerations," was Duer's smiling advice, but there was a kind of a drive even about his smile. — "Forget — everything except your job. Presumably you have, now." He stroked his thick hair, seeming to muse. "I seem to have heard that your father was a dreamer — sunk a lot of money in the George Republic, did n't he? Something of the sort? I'd cut out the dreaming, if it's on your books too. You see I've been investigating. One has to. I take an interest in our new men. Explains these remarks handed out gratis. You're the man we want, I'm sure, — your record — And this is a bully chance for you, this identical moment. The way to make good is to pin to the firm like one's bride, — only first, last, and all the time, — and outside of that make the deuce of an effort to be *flexible*."

And with another twinkle, because it was evident that the words were striking home, he took another man by the arm and descended in the direction of music and champagne.

Little knowing, he left behind him a conscience

excited into a sacrificial conviction, some of that blind heroism with which youth gropes through darkness. It insists so, youth does, in painting its shadows black. It so refuses the neutral things, the compromises, — heroic youth, that is, beset by moral growing-pains. Don Quixote tilted at moonbeams and Donald had been jousting with antagonists as phantasmagoric. Little by little unhappily they had prevailed. They had employed the magic of strange, envisaged terrors. That afternoon especially, through the garish events, through such babbling as that of Percy Ethridge, his ears had been busy — as those of wisdom so often are — with the rag-picking of folly. He had been brought at last irrevocably to the knees of a fate-dealing resolution.

He winced, though, on the brink of its consummation, as who would not? He had become his own football and he was kicking himself hither, thither, and every kick hurt. *Was* he the dreamer? Was he throwing away the precious real things, so short in this short life, for webs of mist? Did his actual vision betray him or were those specters that he saw just creations of his own mind's eye? Yet heretofore he had been able to trust himself. The course he had steered had not been wavering. It had been truer in fact than most. But everything had been easy compared to this!

He smoked in the open window that looked down upon the sea, so that he need not follow the others at

once, need not precipitate the moment. He turned his back upon the room — and in the embrasure they would not notice. The sea was vague from the lit room. Just a dim horizon could be discerned and a few splashes of reflected stars. It was a quiet sea with just a murmur — when the music in the distance paused. Once or twice it seemed to sigh against the rocks.

But the postponement made things still more hard. Those strains of the dance calling through the night were so tender, so insidious. They brought tears to his eyes. They clenched his hands. They whispered of the charm and evanescence of lovely things — the strong things that have to be buried, the sweet things that have to be lost. They whispered of her there — dancing — her trustful eyes — her lithe body that one could crush.

He leaped to his feet, whirling the cigarette through the window, a glowing arc. He ejaculated, "If I don't go now, I never shall!" and thrust himself out into the heat and confusion that poured up from below like the breath from a trumpet. He made his way down the stairs past couples who nodded and joked with him as he passed. They seemed to say that they were glad about his secret, — really not a secret at all, — and wished him well. They seemed to spur his own inclination in its almost irresistible longing.

It was terrible that as his conviction armed itself

his confidence fled. He stood before Augustus Bulyon at last tongue-tied.

Mr. Bulyon made it harder by evincing uncharacteristic emotion. While the crowd whirled around them and danced them into a corner, he held Donald's arm and talked to him as men talk only a few times in their lives.

"Her twenty-first birthday," he said with lips that were peculiarly shaky. "Supposed, as you see, to be an occasion to celebrate. I'm doing my best. It hurts. It seems to be a beginning to all of you. I want you to appreciate what a thundering lot it's the end of, — dolls, hair-ribbons, trifles that take a devilish hold on one, — particularly when there've been only two of us. You see I've had this whole job of raising her seventeen years. I've concentrated on it. Everything else has been a side-issue — even if it's prospered."

He took out his handkerchief and wiped his eyes while he pretended to blow his nose.

"Things seem easy to young people," he said (showing that successful men are capable of gross mistakes). "You talk to the most God-forsaken old sport at the club, my age, — who seems to be enjoying his wining and dining, — and ask him. He'll settle down and tell you, like his own discovery, what lots of blamed hard things there are in life. This handing over one's most sacred trust to another is one of them — even if you're sure that he's the

very fellow you would have picked. I'm reckless tonight. I want you to know — before I've got any business to speak like this at all. But I'm just dashed near the brink of slopping over. Better clear out before I do."

"I'll go," said Donald, not knowing what to say. The older man's emotion worked on him too. He might then have said his word and fled except for the imperative that broke his heart. Monosyllables came to his lips like sharp fragments of that heart working their way forth to the light. "I'll do my best," he said, as one utters a creed, but he knew that the asseveration, in its implication, was a falsehood.

"Oh, I don't mean to be taken too seriously," said Mr. Bulyon, winking back the tears, and Donald knew that he also prevaricated.

He passed along through the crowd cold with despair. His body seemed an automaton, consecrated to accomplish the rest without any more effort of volition.

He did not find her until he had traversed the rooms to one where wide doors stood open, showing lanterns outside and admitting the garden scents. She was just entering with a partner. He had an impression that she wore something white and diaphanous, that a white blossom fallen from some shrub lingered in her dark hair, that her lips were smiling and her eyes full of the excitement of suddenly meeting him.

He attempted to smile too, but tried not to meet her eyes. He was confused by her loveliness. He was confounded by her trust. The hand that she presently put through his arm made him throb. He led her back into the garden.

"If it does n't come off to-night," remarked Elsie Carrington, who "adored" Janet and watched them pass, "I shall put my name down for some sanitarium. My nerves won't stand any more. It's simply got to happen."

"It will happen, no fear," Percy Ethridge returned, remembering the dressing-room and annoyed with those who had witnessed his little idiosyncrasies. "He's methodical and this is just the occasion. Lucky beggar. Why are n't you an heiress, Elsie, and in love with me?"

"Would it affect your feelings toward me?"

"Oh, Elsie, how can you ask?"

"Donald is splendid," said Elsie stoutly. "You need n't insinuate."

"Donald is as splendid as the rest of mankind," Percy sneered.

But if Percy was sardonic, Donald also had his sneer for things to-night. As they moved along the lantern-hung path he was far from unconscious of their distinction, his and hers, and their fitness for each other. He derided the obstacle to the suitable fulfillment. He derided a destiny which must defeat its own logical purpose in order to preserve honor.

He despised a world which could teem with desirable things yet spread a Barmecide's feast. More than all he was contemptuous for himself, having permitted things to go so far before recognizing the difficult truth.

Yet if she should prove able to accept that truth, what cause to worry, after all? He defended his estimate of her and rebuked himself. Her loyalty would prove the logic in his conundrum, the deity in his desert. When at last they reached the bench in the nook in the rocks, overhanging the water, he felt that the sword of the king lay between them and that the plain desire for possession could be quenched.

They had not spoken yet. Nothing in fact but the final word remained. The moment became tense with feeling. To her he was the perfection of manhood, full of mystery, so that when her eyes met his or their hands touched, she trembled while her pulse went faster. With him it was compunction that predominated. He longed to help. He wished that there were an anæsthetic for spiritual operations too. He could not imagine inflicting the wound.

"Donald, I thought you were never coming," she said at last, almost in a whisper.

"Well, I had to hunt for you, you know," he replied. "In fact, I believe you ran away."

She smiled as it were audibly. At least, he felt she smiled. It was so dark that she seemed merely a white shape beside him, light and perfumed, he fancied,

like the flower in her hair. But her emotions were always mysteriously known to him, and he knew that the smile ridiculed the idea of her defection.

"Do you feel so awfully old to-night?" he asked, for the sake of saying something. He was a coward and procrastinated.

"Very old and very sophisticated," Janet said with the little note of youth which finds seriousness in itself. "The people I danced with seemed somehow disappointing. I suppose one gets more bored as one grows old."

"Critical, of course," Donald returned. "I am sure that one expects more. Some of the men who were the whole thing in college seem to have changed."

"Is n't it awfully dismal?" she said; but he knew that she laughed again.

He blurted out of a sudden, almost without preparation, "I suppose when just one thing in the world has hold of one there 's not much chance for anything else."

She quivered at his manner more than his words. He knew what she expected. It was hard to resist. Why not have one hour? There was the primitive man to agitate one's soul!

He arose abruptly and stood with his hands deep in his pockets. He was terribly baffled and terribly racked. At last he threw himself down beside her again.

"Things have got into a rotten mess, Janet," he

murmured at last in stifled tones. "Can't tell you a thing — only ask you to believe and not bind you to that."

"Why — have n't you seen, Don?" she stammered distressed.

He grasped her hands, pressing them violently as he went on. "It can't be helped, Janet, so it's better over. I've taken a job with Seeforth and Grafton. Somebody's got to go to Alaska — to be away some years. It's up to me. I've got to leave here to-morrow."

When he paused, silence dropped between them like a curtain. She sat as if something had suddenly struck her dumb. It was so dark that her face was only an outline, and for the first time her feelings were not conveyed to him.

Of course he would have liked to declare what he felt, but his contract with himself forbade it.

At last she hurriedly stood up as if from a sudden awakening.

"I'm sorry to hear that," she said in monotonous tones. "We shall miss you," and turned toward the house.

He walked behind, hardly conscious of anything.

Those who saw them enter whispered, "She has refused him!"

There was just one chance to take her hand before they parted and he pressed it helplessly again without more words.

A few days later there was a steamer plunging northward, burying its nose determinedly in spray. Donald alone paced the deck's monotonous round. He found in the tremendous motion, in the vast sweep of color about him, in the contest with the gale, added impetus, added resolution. The days of inactivity, of desolation in the train, had been hard to survive. Here was a draught to awaken one's faculties. This untried business did not daunt him. Confidence returned. He saw success ahead. He felt more the man that this unspeakable renunciation was accomplished.

So terrible now seemed to his ambition the decaying properties of ease, coming to a man like that with his wife, that he believed she could not miss his motive. He might have explained, been more generous with himself and less with her. At times that bond he had scorned to impose was a subject for regret. Yet he felt that in the end its absence would still further consecrate their union.

CHAPTER II

It was more than four years later, — a brilliant afternoon in early October, with a sun that came slanting through still leaves and seemed to gather some of the warmth of their brilliance, that Janet Slade sat on her balcony overlooking a far view of hills and valley. She sat in a piazza chair of wicker and green-painted wood and rocked slightly while her eyes and hands busied themselves with a square of filet-work. There was color in her cheeks and a happy curve to her lips. One who had not seen her since the night that Donald Craig departed could have found few distinct changes and would undoubtedly have pronounced whatever general change there was for the better.

An indefinable something, for instance, existed, which gave an impression of substance and distinction. Her figure, as slender as it had ever been, yet appeared more solid, more robust, in a subtle way, than that of the willowy creature of twenty-one. Rings flashed on her quick fingers and as she raised her dark head for a moment pendants of jade were to be seen in her ears, affixed with obvious intention to match the soft Scotch sweater and transforming at a stroke that former expression of innocent, cloudy dreaminess.

Suddenly there was a little sound from the modern wire-netted crib on wheels close by. It was hardly a cry, — rather a murmur, — but she dropped her work on the round table and sprang to forestall any unhappiness at waking that the little one might suffer. The infant, remarkably large and handsome for its year and odd months, smiled up at her as if he appreciated her forethought, struggled with true male determination to extricate himself from the Jaeger blankets and stretched up irresistible arms imploring the mother, for the moment his superior, to take him up.

Janet hesitated, with an involuntary glance toward the door into the house, but remembering that the nurse, her captain, was out for the afternoon, yielded to his peremptoriness and her own yearning, and seized him and half smothered him with caresses.

So warm was the weather that her anxious judgment declared it unnecessary yet to take him in. She sat down once more in the rocking-chair and backed around so that the sun fell full on his fat legs with skin like a flower's and on each pink atom of a toe. Norah being of the school that upholds bare legs, her pupil left them uncovered — except for her kisses. Pretty frequent, these, and each kiss was like the eating of some ineffable delicacy. Then she pulled the blankets up around his back with care, in case of a draught, and adjusted the blue-bordered sweater for which, with other articles of his astonishingly

extensive wardrobe, his person was already becoming too portly.

"Kiss me, baby," she said at last, pouting out her lips for him to imitate, and with a mischievous chuckle, for he already understood most things that were said to him, he snuggled up to her affectionately, then suddenly shot out a little, strong, fat paw and delivered a smart slap on her cheek. Taking this as an invitation to a contest, she buried her nose in his anatomy until he writhed and quaked with laughter.

Then she tried to quiet him, murmuring, "Hush, darling baby!" with the apprehension that for the unspeakable joy of motherhood always hovers at the door. Norah had left a particular injunction not to permit any excitement, and should stirrings mar the tranquillity of his night's sleep, accusing if respectful glances awaited the obvious culprit. Janet's own ignorance appalled her too. Terrible consequences seemed lurking for imprudence.

It was difficult, though, to suppress the tenderness that gushed within her for this wonderful being whom she had produced, surprising with its constant violence, its almost animal fierceness; this longing at times to crush him with caressing, to feel him close against her body, and a jealousy of his handling by others which amused her intelligence while it persisted in her heart.

It seemed to her that no other cup could be more full than had been hers since he came. It was brim-

ming. Its flood of joy threw back somewhere into the mists of long ago that tragic affair with Donald Craig. The passion of that time seemed now a thing apart in her experience, locked in a sealed compartment. Yet there were moments like the present, — incongruous moments, inconvenient moments, when her thought involuntarily flashed back to its cruel strangulation, and, like a restless breeze, sighed around the corners of its sepulture. A malicious demon even accompanied that sigh with the suggestion that the embers might, after all, have been buried alive. Its temerity summoned to arms again the pride which had been her most efficient weapon.

How she recalled and resented the weeks of debilitude that had followed that incredible blow! How strangely her body had behaved, becoming so weak and listless that she was barely able to lift a hand for herself. Nervous prostration they had called it, yet she had felt numb rather than nervous or depressed and her mind had never failed to be clear. There was paralyzation from the mere need of him, the convulsion of her life his absence caused, the humiliation of not being wanted. But when others condemned, she had been his champion, strangely aware that her position as such was void of emotion and only due to her sense of justice.

If he had gradually found that his feeling toward her had changed, she argued, it was only honorable for him to break their relations where they were.

Only a coward or a clown could have failed to do it. She forbade the speculations as to his motives, in her hearing. If in the long nights the true explanation sometimes, among a thousand, crept timidly forward, that perhaps her money had simply withheld him, she rejected it as too wild, a craven attempt of her own heart. Besides, why should he not have said so and asked her to wait? The last scene with him revealed nothing but the suffering of a fine spirit in a cruel predicament.

When at last her strength began to return she followed, with more success, the physician's advice to banish unhappy reflections. If her opinion of Donald had not been hurt, yet her faith in life had been severely wounded, and, as it healed, produced a permanent scar. Yet it came, in time, like the mark of an extracted appendix, to give the assurance of something over with, something less to consider. It made it possible for her at last to decide to accept Osborne Slade.

Among the typical suitors of the vicinity, solid men whose education, objectively concentrated, put them at a disadvantage from the aspect of "culture" with their womenkind, he had undoubtedly been the most interesting. Ten years her senior, the scion of a "first family," personable, artistic, with a Continental diplomatic record, her imagination had been touched and his suit had flattered. Her father's approval had counted. With a chiseled tombstone standing over

passion, one could vow loyalty to mere warmth. The feminine longing to serve something, the dim need for children, helped that warmth to prevail.

The development of events attested the wisdom of this step. Their first two years, spent at first in travel and then in the building of this great house, in which it had delighted her to give Osborne the indulgence of every caprice, had never contained a dull moment or a moment of friction. Then had come this inexpressible morsel, awaking so much that was unexpected in both of them, crowning life, exciting their hitherto decorous connubial affection.

A sudden slant to the sun's rays and a slight chill that seemed to aspire from the earth brought Janet back from these glancing reflections. Past things were vague indeed compared to the exigencies of this absorbing present. Augustus too was anxious to try his feet, whose legitimate use he had only recently become acquainted with, and refused to remain longer on mother's lap, stiffening himself with a strength that promised well for the future and sliding down between her knees grunting and with arms and little dresses confusedly mixed about his ears.

"No, no, baby," said Janet gently, but secretly admiring his lusty refractoriness. "Well, come on, then, mother'll have to take baby into the house."

The idea of doing something different, even if only a compromise, appealed to him, and he clung to her shoulder, interestedly examining her ear, for the first

time come to his notice, while she lifted him in a nest of blankets and entered through the French doors.

The apartment inside, although a bedroom, hers and Osborne's, was magnificent. It was oval, painted in a soft yellow that had a metallic sheen. The secret of the pigments being known only to one man, a Norwegian, he had been transported across the Atlantic that the house might be satisfactorily finished. Yet another artist had searched through studios for suitable textures, and the hangings in this room alone represented incredible effort. The woodwork of the bed, the dressing-table, the chairs, the lounge, was black, polished to a similitude of the finest lacquer. A Chinese silk rug lay on the floor of highly waxed parquetry. Into its ground of yellow the faintest blue was worked, an indescribable blue, which Osborne yet described as that of the Western sky where twilight hovers at dawn. A black Chinese chest with gold dragons stood against the wall and a few pieces of blue, antique ware ornamented the mantelpiece and the table. The Oriental things, Janet knew, were introduced to break a too inartistic consistency. She would have liked to encroach upon it still further with a few old keepsakes, but, except several photographs which he had had judiciously framed, her husband had permitted for the personal touch only a gold toilet-set.

Augustus crowed unconcernedly as he was taken through this unusual chamber, but his mother, feel-

ing perhaps his pink inappropriateness to the color-scheme, hurried him away toward his nursery.

As they passed the head of the wide, curving stairway somebody called, and in a moment Elsie Carrington appeared, ascending.

"It almost embarrasses me to walk into your palace so unceremoniously, Janet," she said; and then, at sight of Augustus, "Oh, the darling thing!"

Janet held the baby out with pride, and Elsie, who had a way with her, immediately gained his favor.

"Norah's day out," Janet explained.

"Are n't you glad?"

"Overjoyed."

"What he must mean to you!" said Elsie, not only sentimentally, but, Janet thought, with a point.

Elsie, using the privilege of best friend, had not concealed a thought or an emotion with regard to the events in Janet's short history, had been herself almost prostrated at Donald Craig's defection, had refused to believe that Janet could care for any other, and had thinly veiled her disappointment at Janet's marriage. In fact, the expression of her sentiments on the last two points had nearly brought their friendship to a rupture. Janet continued to be annoyed when Elsie persisted in galloping on thin ice.

"I will have Annette called to take Augustus," she said, pretending not to have understood, and she gave directions to a manservant who passed.

"Can't we keep him with us?" asked Elsie; and

exclaimed in the next breath, "How gorgeous you are here, my dear!"

"We'll go downstairs," Janet suggested. "Annette will fix baby up."

"Then I shall have a chance to tell you what I came for," Elsie blurted out.

"You don't mean —"? cried Janet, all interest and sympathy at once.

"I do, my dear."

"I'm so glad!" Janet cried, leaning over the baby to give her a hearty kiss. "You don't know how glad I am."

Elsie's eyes sparkled and looked a little teary too.

"I thought you would be glad."

"How could I help it? Jim's the dearest fellow I know."

She turned to the woman who appeared for the baby and gave her several rapid instructions in French, then took Elsie's arm and went down the stairs with her.

"How exciting!" she said. "What are your plans?"

"Not many yet, of course. You are the first I've told, as of course you would be. Jim has got his assistant professorship at last." She laughed good-humoredly. "It would seem queer to you, my dear, to wait for twenty-five hundred a year to get married, but that's what he had to do." She laughed again. "But it's as good as a fortune to us and it's assured. I can't tell you how happy I am."

"And I'm almost as happy as you about it," cried Janet, taking her into one of the smaller rooms, where, among an indescribable profusion of handsome things, a cozy fire blazed under a carved Italian chimney-piece; "happier than I have been for ages," she added. "Now, tell me when it happened."

"Only yesterday," Elsie beamed, warming a muddy foot. And she proceeded to dilate with characteristic romantic enthusiasm upon all her emotions and all her dreams, while Janet, an intent and warm listener, yet could not help remarking, as she would not have done before her marriage, the incongruity between her rather bedraggled friend and the crimson chair, once the property of a cardinal, upon which she lounged.

The conversation, nevertheless, was the most sympathetic that had lately passed between them. It brought back those outpourings of former days when there had always been such an endless lot to talk about, such thrilling secrets, such plans, ideas so surprising and novel. Each had always found then in the other a note of perfect accord and quick response. The close harmony of such times now revived and hallowed this moment of Elsie's supreme story.

An interruption came at last in the voice of the butler, discreet servant who never intruded when that particular room was occupied, and announced invisibly, —

"Mrs. Slade and Miss Slade wish to see you, ma'am."

"Show them into the parlor, Billing," said Janet. "I had no idea it was so late," she added to Elsie, glancing at the clock. "Come along, my dear, and have some tea."

Again for an instant there was a slight criticism in her glance as she affectionately took her friend's arm and impelled her through the enormous hall, where in the dim light of great church candles and the dimmer glow of embers on the hearth one was aware of tapestries looking down and carved beams of black oak far above. If involuntary, she yet felt this criticism to be justified. What inspired it was so easily changed. A little more regard for her appearance, a little more pride in being trig, was not much, after all, to ask of Elsie. It was something that she ought to perceive without a hint. Her failure to perceive it was perhaps the most annoying element of it. Such strange colors and cuts of garments as she managed to get together. Not to speak of her hats. And with a disregard of the fashion that was almost an affectation. True, it had not in the least interfered with her popularity. Her success among the boys and girls, just because she was so queer and fascinating, had been perfect. But older persons had not approved, and the Carringtons in general, although descended from the Pilgrims, had not been sought by exclusive people. Janet felt that the stand-

ards of the older generation were becoming more intelligible, and then, her mother-in-law, whose presence they were about to enter, belonged to the very most exclusive set of all.

Mrs. Slade, sitting in portly, and in fact almost dangerous, dignity on a slender-legged Louis XVI chair, being corseted in such rigor that the deeper chairs were impracticable, was, however, graciously effusive. She kissed Janet several times, warm pecks delivered in spite of the difficulties of a large bust and short neck, and then gave her a welcome surprise by not only pleasantly greeting Elsie, but by taking Elsie's hand in her own pudgy, ringed one and drawing her aside to a narrow settee where she bulged over her and plunged at once into an evidently congenial conversation. That they were both members of the Committee on Rats and Flies in the Women's Protective League then transpired, so that any presumable social barrier was effectively broken.

Janet for her part settled beside her sister-in-law, for whom she felt only lesser awe than for Mrs. Slade. Amelia had turned the forties, — was older, in fact, than Osborne, — and, very tall and imposing, was one of those persons to whom increasing years add only distinction. She carried herself as magnificently as a Life-Guardsman. Her clothes, which were always correct and never extreme, had the perfect fit of a uniform. Though she did not affect jewels in quantity, yet two or three of the valuable Slade heirlooms,

which she had had reset with much study of the subject, were conspicuous upon her person. She made a rather terrifyingly constant use of lorgnettes on the end of a fine gold chain.

Outside of these purely external matters of impression, it was not easy to ignore the fact that Osborne, by his womenfolk, seemed to have been thought to have condescended a trifle in his marriage. Grandfather Bulyon in his obscure parish had presumably not even known by name distinguished Grandfather Slade, rich merchant and Mayor of Boston of the mid-century, nor his equally important cronies whose descendants were still each other's intimates. Janet concurred in the sentiment she suspected. She felt that Osborne might have made almost any alliance. She wondered that he had not mated with a princess, "over there." With his "tone," his talents, the author's career now just beginning to open before him, her modesty continually pictured the contrast that must present itself to his relatives between her shy simplicity and the brilliance that he might have possessed. Had she heard the gossip of the old ladies about town that Mrs. Slade and Amelia had half prompted the match, it would have seemed to her grotesquely incredible.

Amelia was always suave. She now expressed above all things a desire to see the baby, whom the under-nurse opportunely brought in. He was as irresistible and engaging as before, looking innocence,

and surreptitiously trying his best to rumple a clean, new, very much embroidered dress.

While the ladies clustered about him making the ludicrous faces and sounds with which adults usually accost an infant, violent on Mrs. Slade's part and mild on Amelia's, and while his anxious mother looked on with secret disapproval (although his masculine fortitude forbade him to quail), his father entered, as it were to dispute his supremacy.

"Oh, Osborne," said Osborne's adoring mother, "I hoped you would come in. So often you're not here when we come," she complained, giving his hand a little pat.

"I have n't seen Osborne for a month," appended Amelia, whose tones were rather cool and drawling.

Her eyes seemed to meet his almost on a level, although he was over six feet. Perhaps the fact that they could look so well into each other's minds accounted for their close sympathy.

In appearance, too, they were similar. The martial suggestion was in him, not unnaturally, more apparent, accentuated by the small mustaches he wore with the European twist. But he was very much more blond than Amelia, paler in complexion and of course heavier. Except for the almost imperceptible extra padding just beginning to appear at the jaw, the shoulder, and the waist, he could have passed for thirty. His face too was firm and youthful. Alto-

gether a fine figure, not abused in the matter of dress, and distinctly the finished personality.

His mere entrance, Janet felt, seemed to enliven the atmosphere. His manners were to each guest particular and perfect. He took the baby, — who had eyes for no one else when he was present, and could just say, "Ba-ba!" — with an affectionate and tender care that appeared to her astonishing. And when he turned with the baby in his arms, the picture radiated parental felicity.

His mother still continued to chide him for his neglect of her, half seriously.

"Such an infatuated husband!" she declared sententiously. "But after these years poor grandma ought to be shown some consideration again, ought n't she, baby?" And she pretended to make little dashes at Augustus, which were somewhat elephantine.

"Osborne 's working very hard," said Janet.

"When are you going to let us see something that you've written, Osborne?" Amelia asked.

"Takes an age to get the material into shape," Osborne evaded. "By the way, you might help me a bit if it's not too much bother. Will you? When you see Anne Posslethwaite, ask her what she's got of her father's papers and if there's anything she could let me have?"

He referred to a *magnum opus*, to be entitled "A History of the Boston Merchants," which he was compiling. Although he could only be described as a

historian in embryo, not yet having published anything, his work had been kept far from secret, and the world, of the vicinity, at least, was in a state of expectation.

"It must be a fascinating subject," now came from Elsie Carrington, who had a way of darting out into conversations like a terrier from behind a suburban gate. She had several times heard from Janet's lips descriptions of the work which had been as enthusiastic as vague.

At this remark, which seemed to assume a part in the family interests, she instantly attracted the lorgnetted attention of Amelia.

"The voyages of those old traders were as romantic as anything in our history," she persisted, nothing daunted. But, for all her good intentions, her interposition seemed superfluous.

Janet wished secretly that her friend had not thrust herself forward. She knew that Osborne did not fancy her. He had once said that she was too clever to be attractive. She thought him very polite now when he replied with heartiness: —

"It is engrossing — and if one only did n't have interruptions. But Janet makes me run the farm, you see, and in fact this whole thundering big place of hers." (He always frankly disclaimed ownership in her princely possessions.) "That means a thousand details. And writing is the hardest business to get going again, once the thread's broken. I know

you're a fellow-author, Miss Carrington, so you will sympathize."

This recognition of the few stories, clap-trap fiction, which Elsie had managed to get into magazines, was certainly tactful and kind. But he was always considerate, and proved it still more in an instant, giving the baby back to Annette, and declaring, "Here, I'm going to see if I can't persuade father to come in for a bit, my dear. It would cheer him up to see you all."

"How is your father to-day, dear?" Mrs. Slade asked, as he disappeared, and her face arranged itself into an expression of solicitude. Janet's also grew long at the reminder of the one sorrow that had come to them in all their happiness.

Her father, apparently in supreme vigor, had sustained a paralytic stroke the year before, which, from a clear sky, had knocked him instantly into a state of decline. Luckily he had not suffered pain and did not suffer now, his brain, although clear enough, seeming to have been slightly, providentially numbed. Instead of craving his former indispensable activity he now appeared to welcome the passivity enjoined and the care of his constant attendant. Seeing him thus docile, the shock to his daughter had in time become mitigated.

"There's some improvement from week to week," she replied, "but it's pitiably slight."

"Even paralysis is cured sometimes nowadays,

though," said Mrs. Slade. "It's wonderful what they do."

"One can only hope for the best," Janet returned.

In a few moments Mr. Bulyon entered, supported on the one side by his son-in-law and on the other by the trained nurse. It was a slow, pathetic progress, and even with their guidance he was compelled to feel the way with a cane, inch by inch. Of that able, ambitious young man who had come to town forty years before to wrest power from a thousand competitors, little trace remained. One eye was half closed, an expensive but disfiguring attachment depended from one ear, he held his head forward at a peculiar angle from his body, as if, like an animal, groping with that, and, as he walked, it trembled. One side of his face was rigid, and one perceived down the length of his body on that side the crooked path of the lightning-bolt.

The splendid apartment with its luxury, the fruit of his endeavors, but which another had garnered, seemed to mock him in the firelight.

The tears came into Janet's eyes as she watched his crablike approach. The havoc that had been wrought was, on the occasions when he attempted to move, especially striking and heartrending. In spite of her hopeful words, — and she was repeating the doctor's verdict, — the occasions were becoming more rare.

Mrs. Slade came forward with aplomb and made

numerous remarks which required no answer. The invalid, with great effort on the part of his assistants, was finally seated. The baby began to cry at sight of his grandfather and was removed. Mr. Bulyon, always the kindest man in the world, evidently felt the old impulse to make people happy stirring somewhere within. He mumbled unintelligible words which the trained nurse tried to interpret, while those who had become his family listened in patience.

Finally, after Elsie had departed and Mr. Bulyon had remained as long as the nurse considered wise, Janet felt compelled to remind her husband that they had an early engagement for dinner preceding a theater expedition into town.

He was sitting at her side and unaffectedly held her hand in his. At the news she imparted he arose, making a gesture of despair.

"You see, mother, what a butterfly I've married. Drags me out every evening!"

"And you such a stay-at-home," remarked Amelia, rising with Mrs. Slade.

"When am I going to do my work?" he asked his wife, throwing out his hands, a frown on his brow and a smile on his lips.

His mother kissed him with fervor. "Don't let him burn the candle at both ends, Janet!"

And Janet also smiled, for she knew that, in spite of his protestations, evenings at home alone with her made him restive.

CHAPTER III

It might be said that Amelia Slade divided her occupations into two categories, the one concerned with charity and religious pursuits and the other with social life. Yet there was so close a connection between the two fields that the boundary-line was hard to define.

It was in the interests of both that she had persuaded Janet to become a member of the Board of Lady Managers of the Heath Rescue Home. In the first place, this Board had the distinction of having been instituted a century before and still consisted mainly of representatives of the founding families. An aristocratic *cachet* had become attached to its name. Vacant places were filled with much deliberation, where the old families were depleted, from the ranks of Present Power. A chance thus presented itself for Janet, now invested with the name of Slade, to associate with the innermost circle, which, as a Bulyon, and without a mother to assist, she had only brushed on the outer rim. Secondly, of all her Causes, Amelia was most touched by the Cause of Fallen Women, and here was where she was most anxious to see the overflow of the Bulyon millions empty itself.

She had secured her sister-in-law's appointment easily with the weight of her own influence, but her

acceptance, strangely enough, had been more difficult to win.

Janet had so far held aloof from Problems, or rather, an obedient and trustful daughter, she had taken her father's word for it that his contributions to Philanthropy covered their obligations and had felt no inclination to argue his mandate to avoid, at least while she was young, contact with sordid things. Her efforts for those who vaguely composed the great body of The Masses had been confined to a certain amount of hospital visiting, laden with flowers from the garden or greenhouse, which the footman carried behind her in a large box and which she distributed to smiling convalescents in clean nightgowns, who seemed to be either happily receiving friends, or being carefully tended by attractive nurses, or lounging in content with the last Best Seller. Here no sign of misery had come to her eyes, nor yet in the Associated Charity office, where as a *débutante*, the League had persuaded her to make weekly visits, and where for an hour or two she had copied reports on cases onto cards, in a fine handwriting, occasionally, perhaps, initiated to lurid details, but in an impersonal and disconnected way which carried no emphasis.

But as a married woman, a matron, she acquiesced in Amelia's verdict, if reluctantly, that it was high time for her to take an active part in Social Service, and so, on a day when snowflakes were lazily drifting to earth from a dull sky, she left early the studio in the

Fenway Building where she painted three times a week, and was wafted in the limousine which made it possible for her to reside twelve miles out of town and still live a city life, to the door of a large mansion on a Commonwealth Avenue corner.

As it belonged to a family of great prestige she entered with some interest to see with what household gods the Meanses were surrounded, but, except for some valuable paintings in the hall, the furniture in the big rooms she passed indicated a mediocre taste, and smacked of the professional interior decorator of the Victorian era.

Although a clock somewhere striking indicated her promptness, she found only five ladies assembled in the reception-room where the footman finally landed her, and these as yet had not at all assumed the aspect that one might suppose appropriate to a Board Meeting.

Mrs. Means, whom she knew by sight without having been introduced, small, erect, and pleasant-looking, in a very sheer and low-necked waist and with a large button-pearl in each ear, lightly held in her hands the ends of the fur stole encircling Amelia, who towered above.

"When you say that I should have gone on with the hearts," she was saying, "how do you dispose of the knave that Dicky held over me?"

"But the clubs had been cleared in the first round," Amelia protested. "You had a reëntry card there."

"Well, it could not have made a difference of more than one trick."

"Two!" Amelia insisted, laughing but firm.

Then she raised her lorgnettes and perceived Janet, whom she greeted with, if anything, more than her usual suavity, and presented to Mrs. Means.

"We are fortunate in persuading you to come on our Board, Mrs. Slade," said the latter politely, yet with a keen scrutiny. Janet had a feeling that her points of eligibility were being enumerated rather from the social than the useful point of view, but she was transferred, anyway, to the other group, of three, one of whom, Virginia Higbee, she already knew, a young woman between twenty-five and thirty, who affably admitted her to their conversation and inquired whether she had considered the Charity Ball a success.

While they went on to say that they thought the favors had been poor, considering the price of subscription, and that the fast Mrs. Ogden had actually dared to wear one of those purple wigs, now the rage (with a class!) in Paris, and had danced all the evening with Jim Livermore, who had never been supposed to be one of her beaux, several other ladies drifted in.

There was the type of eager spinster who collects Board memberships with avidity and is carefully eccentric in dress. There were the stout, comfortable, large-hearted elderly matrons who earnestly desire to

fill their own lives with good deeds and the lives of others with happiness, but find it necessary to apply elsewhere for ideas on means and methods.

Mary Ethridge, the sister of the frivolous Percy, but, except in her blonde, lanky, rather Scandinavian physique, contrasting as brothers and sisters often do, conscientious, full of high purpose, hurried in with a legal-looking green bag, paper-choked. She was an old school-friend of Janet's and moved a chair next hers.

Shortly afterwards a smooth-faced clergyman entered, whose profession, except for his dress, one would not have suspected. He had very thick, curly black hair, not short, a high color, and one of those beards which, however carefully shaven, show vigorously upon jaw and lip, under the skin. He had black eyebrows too, which met together, and lustrous dark eyes. His mouth was rather mobile, yet the muscles that controlled it looked firm.

At his arrival, which seemed to create rather a flutter, and for the lateness of which he apologized, the meeting was called to order by one of the older women, and, as Janet later learned, it being a quaint stipulation of the ancient charter that the business should be preceded by a prayer conducted in orthodox fashion, all the ladies made of their chairs temporary *prie-dieux*. The prayer was long and clearly enunciated in an accent that smacked somewhat consciously of Britain. It called God to witness that

in spite of all efforts of the Elect, Magdalenes still exist in the world and sin has still to be battled. There was some reference to the Devil, which, by its seemingly intimate knowledge, astonished Janet, herself brought up in a most liberal faith. The terrors of hell for the damned and the glories promised to saved souls were detailed as graphically as in those Old-World frescoes where the mediæval imagination disports itself on church and cloister walls. The clergyman talked about days of enlightenment and hope and the Grace which deigned occasionally, it seemed, to interfere with the moral disaster still existent among the miserable beings It had permitted to be created. He called down Its assistance upon these weak but well-intentioned servants in their efforts to represent Its beneficence. One felt overcome by his insight into Divine purposes, the righteousness that he felt himself inspired with.

He paused and opened his eyes, closed through his appeal until now, and looked dramatically around the room with its costly objects and the prostrate forms, worth, had one cared to compute, probably several millions of dollars.

He concluded with an eloquent peroration which invoked heavenly sanction with a very touching solemnity for the proceedings of the Board.

A pause followed before the ladies rose and many an eye was then discovered to be damp with emotion. Janet also was stirred and felt for the first time the

consciousness of being, if even in a small way, an agent of power and one of a body of other agents all intent, if only for the moment, upon actually achieving good deeds.

The business before the meeting proceeded rather prosily. There were numerous official reports: the matron's, a list of admitted and discharged cases, a list of patients where operations had been necessary, a record of changes in employees, etc., etc.; a treasurer's, which was read very fast, a jumble of items, it seemed to her, each one ending up in a statement of so many dollars and so many cents. She wondered if her colleagues were able to carry in their heads the arithmetical problems thus adroitly thrown at them and which they all appeared wisely to assimilate.

But her neighbor, Virginia Higbee, was disillusionizing, for she murmured in the very middle of one of the lists, "What did you think of him?"

"Who?" she asked, uncomfortably.

"Why, the Reverend Graves? You've heard the gossip about him and your sister-in-law? Very romantic."

But, although numerous late-comers had arrived after the prayer and by occupying seats in front had obscured them, Janet nudged Virginia as an intimation to her to be still. She had a distaste for impropriety and was also extremely interested in this her first meeting. Still, she wondered what relations could exist between Dr. Graves and Amelia, and while

Mary Ethridge read the minutes of the previous meeting over her head, her eye could not help straying, speculatively, from one to the other.

Visitors for the completed month next gave their reports, frankly discussing and inviting discussion on difficult problems that had arisen. Janet gathered that the Home, after carefully tending the mothers, and, on their arrival, the babies, even inquired into their prospects, helped them to meet the future, secured homes for them, visited them in their homes, and provided employment and sustenance. She was surprised at the scope of the work and again had a sensation of vivid satisfaction that she had identified herself with it. The organization seemed to be an efficient machine with the high standard of accomplishment that such a machine ought to have. As one case after another was detailed where happiness and purpose had been brought into a life seemingly wrecked, each story ending, as it were, in the time-honored final words, "And they lived happily ever afterward," she wondered, considering that this was only one charity out of a thousand-odd, it was said, in the city, how there could be any misery left.

The visitor who had been talking sat down with a comprehensive beam upon the company.

"We thank Mrs. Hale for her report which makes us all very happy," said the president, rising. "Will Miss Atkinson now tell us her experiences?"

Miss Atkinson, who looked rather old and rather severe, took the floor.

She spoke in a rambling way which took it for granted that her hearers knew what she was talking about before she enlightened them. It was more than an hour since the actual time that the meeting had been called and members of the Board were dropping away one by one. In fact, it had seemed to Janet that the peaceful interval between the dropping in and the dropping out of the members had been very short.

Miss Atkinson also had had some successful cases, but there had been two deaths whose details she described at great length. And then, just as the president was about to acknowledge her report, she said: —

"If you think it's in order, Mrs. President, I'd like to mention the case that's been such a trial for the matron, Miss Hewes. The girl comes back and back. Says her baby ought to have lived. Says she's going to find a way to get even with the Home."

Miss Atkinson looked around upon her now impatient audience and smiled dryly. "It's been very unpleasant for Miss Hewes," she reiterated.

"What is the case you refer to, Miss Atkinson," inquired the weary president.

"Oh, I didn't mention the name, did I? A girl named Agnes Price. She lost her baby, you know.

But Dr. Andrews attended her, which speaks for itself."

"The girl's a thoroughly bad lot," seconded the other visitor, Mrs. Hale, who had resumed her seat.

"You did n't mention it, Mrs. Hale," said the president, deprecatingly. "It is the first complaint of that kind we have ever had, that I can remember."

"I thought, you know, that our insurance covered that sort of thing — if it comes to a suit, I mean," Mrs. Hale suggested, nodding as if the exercise helped the internal mechanism of her head.

"So it does," said the president.

"Miss Hewes says the girl's in trouble again," murmured Miss Atkinson, looking the picture of indignation.

One of the impatient members here shrilly interposed. "Then she does n't come within our province at all, does she — as we take only first offenders?"

"No, I think we can drop this case. If that is all we thank you for your report, which is accepted, Miss Atkinson," said the president. "Is there any other business before the meeting?"

"The visitors for the coming month," a conscientious voice prompted.

"Oh, yes." The officers bent their heads murmuringly over a list. "Mrs. Stickney's abroad," the president then said. "She never sent you any word, did she, Miss Ethridge? Miss Ropes has had to go to Saranac with her brother. Such a sad case! Mrs.

James, — oh, cross out her name, Miss Ethridge, — of course they're in Washington this winter. — How about you, Mrs. Devereux? You visited month before last? Well, our new members then. Would you take January, Mrs. Slade?"

Janet was embarrassed at becoming so unexpectedly the object of all eyes, but she signified assent and really felt a thrill of enthusiasm. Another visitor was finally gleaned from among the veterans, who, when the meeting was adjourned, as it rapidly was, promised to initiate Janet in her duties.

"Come home to lunch with me," said Mary Ethridge. "This is the day I always have people drop in."

Janet glanced at the clock, and, seeing how late it was, accepted. In the crowd that pressed chattering out she found herself again contiguous to Virginia Higbee and could not resist the question, "What were you going to tell me about Amelia?"

"Oh, nothing," Virginia returned, laughing slyly. "But she and Dr. Graves work together, you know, and it is considered a great affair. The romantic part of it is that he is said to have taken the monastic vows."

This was, indeed, gossip with a spice in it, but Janet was cogitating other things when she joined Mary Ethridge.

"Why don't they hold these meetings at the Home, Mary?" she asked.

"People are too busy to go way out to Heath Street. No one would come."

"Once a month is n't asking much, though."

"It's been tried, and we still have the Annual Meetings there. But attendance at the monthly ones was too small to be worth while."

Janet could not help intimating that if this were so the members must take their responsibilities rather lightly, but Mary, who was making the science and practice of philanthropy her life-work, had an adequate answer.

"You see, we can't expect every one to be an Earnest Worker," she said with her little precise air which had become accentuated with the multiplicity of her charitable pursuits, and which when she spoke with unusual eagerness, as now, was accompanied by red spots which appeared and disappeared in the center of her blonde cheeks.

Her tendency toward categories, from a constant association with statistics and cases on file, sprang from her lips.

"Besides the few Efficient on a Board we have to have the Affluent, persons who can be counted upon to give, whose names are widely known and attract others to the subscription lists. And we are not unmindful of their own welfare either. If they feel that they are Helping Others a little and the feeling elevates them, why on earth should they be rejected, — even if their presence is n't an advantage, — and

in consequence our Cause, whatever it may be, suffer from their loss?"

"It sounds plausible," Janet admitted, doubtfully, "but it seems illogical that persons who are more or less indifferent should direct the vital affairs of others."

"Not Indifferent, my dear," Mary objected, — "just Busy. Why, most of those women whom you saw to-day have so many irons in the fire that I wonder they keep track of things as well as they do. Yet any one of the organizations they are mixed up in would resent it if they resigned."

Janet protested that she at least wanted to know what she was about before setting forth on her first mission. But people were already floating into the big, old-fashioned house on Beacon Hill where Mary and a family of adult brothers and sisters centralized, and the duties of hostess were insistent.

"There's nothing to tell you, anyway, my dear," she dropped hurriedly. "Just go out to the Home and ask for Miss Hewes. Give her a few questions. When she gets used to you they can go deeper. See some of the inmates, although that's not absolutely necessary and might be distressful. Some of them are so dismal, poor things. Follow your own social instinct; that's the best. Oh," she added, "there is just one thing you might look into that interests me personally. It will give you a cue for a start. It's the literature question. *Most* important. The rule about indiscriminate read-

ing ought to be enforced. I will give you some selected books to take out."

They repaired to the lunch-table, where the conversation, gay and informal, and filled with the latest town tid-bits, seemed to Janet most diverting. It was like the orgy of her *débutante* year, for, since her marriage, their travels, their establishment, and then the baby had kept her out of this sort of thing. Despite the local gayety of the country life and the occasional dinners and balls to which they had come in town this first free winter, yet, as Osborne lunched at home, she had seldom deserted him for the more informal and free gatherings of women.

Still, for all the conviviality there was a certain restless atmosphere which one felt without defining. Two of the guests had announced as they entered that it would be necessary for them to leave the moment lunch should be finished, and were seen to consult their wrist-watches from time to time. Another was called to the telephone on three separate occasions, and Mary herself confided to Janet that she had another meeting at half-past two and wanted her opinion on the etiquette of deserting her guests, should any, at that hour, still be lingering.

What active creatures they were, to be sure, and how astonishingly occupied! It seemed to Janet very creditable that they should display eagerness over such a wide field of interests when only a few years before their hours had all been filled with events of a

purely frivolous nature. She assumed the character of a country mouse, pretended to be awed by them, and declared that for her enlightenment they must submit to a cross-examination on the spending of their time.

Anne Kittredge claimed the most profitable afternoon and fished a printed card out of her blue wrist-bag with its gold initials.

"I am attending a course of six lectures at the Women's State Federation Rooms on 'The Poetry of Prose,'" she asserted, "but I must confess that I have not looked up this afternoon's special subject." She consulted the card, "Oh, yes, Dr. Roland Carter on 'Love in Literature: Its Use and Abuse.' It's bound to be interesting. Come with me, dear."

Janet, however, shook her head, laughing, nor showed any more amenity to the other invitations that were hurled at her, for concerts, fairs, or even the Fancy Skating Exhibition. She whimsically launched herself at the one person at the table who had remained silent.

"I think I'll go with Élise," she announced.

"I wish I could ask you, my dear," Élise returned rather hastily, "but, you see, it's my Bridge Club and the tables are all filled."

"How disappointing!" exclaimed Janet in mock chagrin, but it was evident that Élise did not relish her humor.

As later she leaned back in the motor-car, exhausted and puzzled at her exhaustion, considering

her natural vigor, it occurred to her among the impressions of the day that Élise, of all the people she had seen, appeared to take herself the most seriously.

Her thoughts, however, gladly left other themes for her baby whom she missed and longed for. He was so fascinating at this age of astonishing changes that she wondered how she could leave him for an hour and thereby miss, perhaps, some sacred, precious thing.

She hurried to the nursery when she reached the great house at the end of its long uphill driveway. The day seemed to be clearing colder. She thought the nurse might have brought the child in. One of the servants, however, stated that they were still out, but could give no information as to the direction taken. . . .

She met her father's trained nurse in the hall, hovering anxiously to waylay her.

"He's seemed low all day, Mrs. Slade," she responded to inquiry. "His pulse is weak and I don't like it."

"Can I see him?"

"I think he would hardly know you. He's very tired. Perhaps it's better not."

"Have you sent for Dr. Ward?"

"I got him on the 'phone. He says it's not unusual to have such spells, but he'll come out later."

Janet went softly downstairs again. This sort of report of her father was not new. The nurse had

proved rather a pessimist. She was not alarmed, but she felt depressed and restless. Tired as she was the idea of lying down, recommended by the doctor since the baby's birth, was repugnant. The house, with all these treasures that Osborne had collected, had never before seemed so impersonal. . . . She wondered where Osborne was. She wished she had not stayed so long in town. She wished she had her baby to herself. Yet she was aware that if the best possible nurse had not been procured for him, if she had abstained from Social Life, or refused to go on that Board, she would have become the object of keen criticism. Without analyzing the matter it seemed to her vaguely that the criticism would have been just. Nevertheless, there was a discrepancy somewhere and another Problem reared its head at her, her to whom Problems were so new and distasteful. She determined to exorcise them with fresh air and ordered her horse to be saddled.

There was little frost in the ground and a week of unseasonable warmth had rendered it springy. She determined to try a wood-path that was usually impassable in winter. The twigs and branches were covered with white hoar-frost. The sky was that milky blue of a clement winter day, with cottony clouds, purple-tinted, sailing through it and occasionally dropping snowflakes. There was little breeze to drive them and here among the sere brakes and wood-patches all was peculiarly still. Nothing

sounded except the rhythmic thud of her mare's hoofs and an occasional half-hearted call from a winter bird.

What a privilege, this sudden communion with nature after such a confusion of tongues and ideas and purposes as she had mingled in that morning! To her it was more potent than religion — of which, indeed, she knew little — in bringing back one's inner harmony. Yet the very consciousness of needing that was in itself something new, something which indicated the gap traversed since girlhood with its simple, guarded outlook, something which for the first time, if vaguely, made her analytical of experience and suspicious of life's complications. This apprehension of the depths and extraordinary complexity of the sea upon whose surface she had hitherto been wafted in a well-appointed bark, carried with it a poignancy both of pleasure and of pain which was a revelation. It presented so much more in the mere act of living than, in her shelter, she had been impelled to guess, and introduced her to herself too as a new being of mysterious possibilities. It was as if a veil fell from her eyes, or began to fall, now that as a woman she was allowed to view hitherto unpermitted contrasts such as had suggested themselves that morning, and the dull monotony of hue it had imparted to things vanished as it fell, superseded by stimulating varieties. Also, not ignoring the fact that it had glossed plague-spots, she thought herself ready to face them

if only for the strong savor of reality that the broad light of day instilled.

Her heart sprang with the exhilarating motion of the animal with whom for the time she was united. As they clove the air her cheeks burned. Her imagination ran riot like a child's. The actual sensation of plunging forward into the now darkening woodland seemed the concrete illustration of a quest through the unexplored regions of existence. That she felt for the first time a sense of maturity and qualification for its encounters had a buoyancy all its own and a delight, which intimated to her, also for the first time, her own capacity for passion.

As the wood-path issued again upon a main road she was aware of a party of people, also equestrians, approaching. Two cantered ahead in single file along the soft dirt outside the tar, and behind two rode abreast at a smart trot.

The first pair drew up and hailed her. They were neighbors, the Gordon Eliots. Then she perceived that of the second couple the man was her own husband.

"Osborne!" she exclaimed, and smiled at her own pleasurable surprise.

He was never more dashing and commanding than on horseback. The get-up became him. The usual slight sallowness of his complexion was now suffused by the flush of exercise. In her new mood of appreciation she was stirred by his appearance.

"My dear!" he cried exuberantly, curbing and at the same time touching with his spurs a rather unruly steed, "I wish you had been with us. I waited, hoping you'd be back. An impromptu beagle-party at the Cliffords'. Maurice wanted to try out his pack. 'Phoned at lunch."

The rebellious animal he bestrode, of proportions worthy of his master, and what sportsmen term a "blue," curveted and wheeled several times before consenting to stand in trembling rigidity.

"I want you to know Mrs. Lansing, Janet," said Osborne then. He added something in his companion's direction which ended with the words, "My wife."

The lady, who, on a docile roan, had been watching their *rencontre* from the background, a lady with a classical purity of feature on a miniature scale and yet with mischievous eyes and a high-spirited curve to the nostril, advanced smilingly. The commonplaces were exchanged. Time existed for no more, as the Eliots were urging them to come along. Yet Janet had the impression that nothing connected with this lady could be quite commonplace. There was a remarkable charm merely in her greeting, and her eyes seemed flatteringly to invite a further relationship, to imply that you held for her an especial interest.

Their roads, however, seemed here to part. Gordon Eliot, already ahead, called back rather impatiently, "Good-bye, Miriam! See you to-morrow!"

Osborne, characteristically courteous, suggested that they escort Mrs. Lansing on her divergent way, but she rejected the proposal with a determined lift of the chin.

"It's not a mile to the Beekmans'!" she protested.

She waved her white-gloved hand to plump, smart little Dorothy Eliot, who kissed hers, made a comprehensive acknowledgment of the Slades' farewells, with a shade of sprightliness perhaps for Osborne, and turned at a gentle amble into the path that forked to the left, seeming to take with her something of significance as she went.

"Who is she?" Janet tried to ask her husband, but the "blue," with the Eliots by this time a hundred paces in advance, could not be restrained from bolting to join them, and for the remainder of the ride Gordon Eliot, so to speak, held the floor, voluble on his favorite theme, anathema of Mr. Theodore Roosevelt, who, just returned from slaughter in the wilderness and a ripping good time, secretly intended, so Gordon said, to stand for a Third Term and disintegrate the Republican Party.

Osborne, thus baited, for he admired the Strenuous Man, refused, however, to "rise" and maintained his end of the conversation, his wife thought, against the hair-triggered Gordon, with admirable grace and moderation.

Her newly opened eyes were, indeed, ready to find an idol, and she half wondered at this moment, when

they entered their house together in close accord, whether it were possible that he was to become, after their years of fond, but prosaic marriage, the Endymion of these later day-dreams.

On the very threshold, however, it was clear that the harmony of their household was upset. There was a scent of disaster. The telephone-bell in the den close by was ringing with the insistence of a crying child without apparently bringing any one to its relief. Servants' voices, nevertheless, could be heard in loud talk from their ell, to which the doors, another phenomenon, must be standing open. Actual wails, too, were coming from Augustus's lungs, somewhere remote but audible.

Osborne stepped to the instrument, crop in hand, and, lifting his eyes to his wife, said, "It's Dr. Ward. — Wants to know how your father is. Delayed by a blow-out."

On the stairs, at his voice, had appeared a gray apparition, with a pallid face.

"The doctor must come instantly, Mrs. Slade," she said, clasping the balustrade with a rigidity which she seemed trying to preserve in spirit.

"Is he worse? — Miss Douglas?" cried Janet, pulling off her gloves and hurrying upwards.

The nurse nodded.

"What has happened? Where is everybody?"

"I took the liberty of sending the butler in your car to find some doctor in the neighborhood, Mrs.

Slade. Dr. Ward could n't be placed on the 'phone. Some one ought to have been here."

In spite of years of discipline her lip trembled. The one thing she was not supposed to cope with was responsibility.

"Then, it's the worst!" murmured Janet blankly, dazed. That it should have come like this, in her absence, the blow which they had expected so long that it had begun to seem interminably postponed! It was almost as terrible as if they had had no warning.

She stumbled, full of self-reproach and unspeakable grief, into the room where lay the shell of what had been Augustus Bulyon, shattered, abandoned by its denizen. It lay in mute collapse upon the bed where hurried hands had evidently disposed it, the members in unnatural attitudes like those of a doll thrown aside by a child. The suddenness of encountering these familiar lineaments thus, the sight of the ultimate transfiguration of the body coming like this for the first time, produced in Janet at first a flood of concentrated passion, the torrent as it were of all that in his life she had left unexpressed. Overwhelmed with the consciousness of what he had been to her, father and friend, and his distinguished place in the world which had given her pride, she embraced the inanimate relic as if it could respond. It seemed, if she persisted, as if some warmth must return. Pressed against her palpitating body it seemed the

heart must beat. Yet, — could one wish him back, poor soul, to that recent half-human existence? Something of the chill began to creep into her own veins at the thought and the horror of being brought face to face with the futile destiny of each of us. . . . As the realization of his utter inaccessibility grew, she could have cried in her inexperience for some formulated belief in human continuance — for some signal of hope. It became intolerable to contemplate the end of life and love as the mere dropping of a curtain, the mere extinction of a flame. . . .

How unfathomable, too, even to her, his nearest, was the meaning of his closed adventure. How could the reality of him then be perpetuated? The frozen face was an enigma. There would never again be light in it. Whatever it had failed to reveal was now forever sealed. Only her own imagination pictured the days of youth and supreme effort, the struggles, the love-story. And here again one met a tender ghost, the misty figure of a departed mother. . . .

She arose from her knees beside the body and went to the door.

"Osborne!" she called forlornly; "Osborne!"

It was rather surprising that, with his usual devotion, he had not now kept close to her side.

The trained nurse glided from somewhere.

"The local doctor has just come. I think Mr. Slade is with him," she said.

And in fact in a moment the two men did appear.

While the doctor inspected, Osborne remained outside. When they came out again, — she and the doctor, after the short examination, — she noticed how splotchy with white and how queer Osborne's face looked. She could not have believed he would be so distressed.

He was most eager and exact, though, in taking down the physician's further instructions. He insisted upon her retiring either to her room or to the baby and declared that he would see the specialist when he should arrive and in fact take complete charge. His eager tact brought a great sense of relief. He was the prop that a husband should be at such a juncture. His competence closed again that door of the secret chamber of the spirit which the tide of her emotion had burst open, clamoring for a guest.

CHAPTER IV

For Janet Slade the day of her father's death remained ever afterwards a milestone in her own life. At the time, or, rather, in the period immediately following, when she had naturally found much food for meditation, it had seemed a curious coincidence that he should have departed from her at the moment when she had first, as it were, come into her own, in that strange, new, critical consciousness of self and self's surroundings which marks real maturity. That half-epic, half-tragic moment had for her, as for other children of fortune, been postponed through careful guardianship far beyond the age when the wider aspect dawns upon those born in the contest of the arena, but had in itself been the closing of a chapter. And it was not that alone, she found, in the progress of time, that her father's decease marked. Frail as had been the thread of those last poor years, it was astonishing how many outer changes its demolition wrought.

The interval of mourning, of course, had had its own differences. It had been sacred, and a time of long, secluded hours. She had read, painted, rested. Its most precious opportunity had been the uninterrupted companionship, except for the nurse's claims, with her little son. She found that the quiet

resources, which usually seemed to strike the social world as peculiar, were legitimately permitted by convention under the guise of respect to a memory. Since the days of her sally into that restless whirl she had not, to this extent, been allowed to indulge them. Apart from their intrinsic pleasure they also constantly struck the associative note of her tender relationship with her father.

Her instruction had been his hobby. At variance after a few years' trial with the methods of the schools, so often the sorry compromise of frantic theories, he had educated her largely under his own roof. The arts, before which, poor man, his own crude taste knelt in awe-struck veneration, had been insisted upon. Also the element of personality in teachers. The social value of school did not appeal to him. It was jealousy, perhaps, or priggishness, but he had substituted travel. At the end, he relented, permitting the regular course at Radcliffe, but, superintending her mental explorations through the impressionable 'teens, his own figure always would stand dominant.

"Old-fashioned," this bringing up, according to the ladies whose daughters were sophisticated at sixteen, and who, barely knowing Augustus Bulyon, yet watched his millions. But it had fostered a love of inquiry into things which is more precious than they guessed. Perhaps they were right in its insufficiency as armor.

Whether the test of education is its results one here might wonder. Do the results for women matter anyway? The fruit that was at least the most precious to Janet was from an independent source. This baby, this other Augustus, with his beauty, his lustiness, his incredible daily progress, seemed so. He offered happiness so deep that there was never enough time to enjoy it. And it was ineffably gratifying to notice how her increased devotion was repaid by his growing preference for her. Even Norah the dictator became rather a grudging rival.

Of the friends who intruded, for it was almost an intrusion, Elsie Carrington was, as by right, the most frequent and the most welcome. The whirl of social occupations which other visitors either detailed in the mistaken hope of amusing Janet, or tried to obscure with an empty and obvious attempt to share her grief, had become remote from Elsie's new sphere. Adaptable and rather intense, her enthusiasm as a three-months' bride enabled her to present the rather limited life she had entered upon in interesting and diverting terms. When, however, her attention turned to Janet's affairs the latter felt herself unaccountably reserved, realizing that their marriages, as is so often the case, had brought discrepancies.

But of all the changes of this period none was more marked than that in Osborne, who was almost constantly away, in contrast to his former perpetual presence. Gloom had proved insupportable to him.

It was natural, she thought, considering it had not been *his* father. A man was out of place, besides, in such a quiet house. They were all better off that outside interests called him.

Except for a duck-shooting expedition to Virginia shortly after Mr. Bulyon's demise, these interests might almost be regarded, too, as in the way of business. The publication of his book, into which it had been necessary to put some money, as various firms, although with universal approbation, had declined to take the commercial risk, had in their despite brought him prestige. Without much originality of viewpoint it had the merits of a faithful delving into historical records, with a style in presentment that was good. Both subject-matter and treatment had been flattering, too, to many of the old-established families who still defied the proverb that from shirt-sleeves to shirt-sleeves it is three generations. It had been bought to an extent that half covered its production, and, far more satisfying, gave inspiration for further efforts to the author.

There had seemed justification enough in fact for the renting of an office downtown, "studio" being perhaps a preferable term, except for its location in the business section. Important work, Osborne was convinced, and easily convinced Janet, could not possibly be accomplished at home. Even in that big house the voice of Augustus, who was apt as he grew older to express his desires vociferously, was able to

penetrate the most remote corners. And there were endless distractions. People have little respect for a home telephone. His mother, toward whom he was never discourteous, and others, would have a different attitude toward an office. Then there were the farm-people always coming in. . . . Trivialities, but disturbing. Though the rent of these "diggings," convenient to the station and possessing an inspiring view over the city, was two thousand a year, he was sure that it was worth it.

Since then an even more gratifying and significant thing than the acceptance of the book, though perhaps allied, had happened. Osborne's loyalty to Mr. Roosevelt persisted even after the matricidal deed, the marvelous Convention, and the nomination of the Great Hunter to the leadership of the Bull Moose. Not only was his fidelity noised abroad like that of other eminent rebels, but it was even expatiated upon by enthusiastic journals who alluded to him as the "millionaire author." Before he knew it, almost, Osborne encountered his own portrait to right and left, accompanied by a rune which recommended him to the public as the only reputable candidate for a certain legislative seat.

With all this it had been possible to wedge in a trip to England for July, ostensibly for Janet's benefit. They had returned to the Manchester house where Mrs. Slade and Amelia, accustomed to a few weeks' summer sojourn in some fashionable hotel, eked out

with visits, were gladly established in charge of Augustus.

After that the campaign had come. Osborne proved to be a first-rate stump-orator and even "mixer." His womenfolk could not but admire the diversity of his talents, from the miraculous little artistic touches with which he dispelled the stiffness of the Manchester place to this last unsuspected trait of leadership among men. Their delight was great when at last in November his election was actually accomplished.

He was invested with his new dignity just about a year after Mr. Bulyon's death. His duties made it more convenient to close the Wyndham house and reside for the winter months in town with the Slades on Marlborough Street, where, if things were somewhat contracted, they could perfectly well manage. At first dubious on Augustus's account, Janet had perforce taken the opinion of three physicians that no harm would come to him, and naturally absorbed in her husband's new work, had at last acquiesced in this departure.

There were interests of her own which the move facilitated. Her first month of visiting at the Heath Home, postponed, of course, out of consideration for her bereavement, had convinced her of her own aptitude for charitable work. The earliest visits had been tentative, and, before one knew the ropes, obviously one was chary of self-expression, but after

the ice was broken, and she found herself able to talk with candor to the inmates, ideas presented themselves. There was even a heart-warming sensation in finding the chasm that existed between herself and these women spanned by their mutual experience of motherhood. The contact with them had been full of surprises. Creatures whom one had pictured with repugnance, that had varied only in degree from the shuddering half-knowledge of virginity to the cold denunciation of womanhood, proved so human, so likable. Instead of characteristics that were abominable, shocking, peculiar to a degraded caste, the impulses that had dominated them were perfectly intelligible. For the most part the worst they could be accused of, psychologically, was not so much weakness as a mere average lack of heroism, the failure to accept with fortitude almost intolerable conditions of life in the face of tempting contrasts. The brand that she had half expected to find was an illusion. They could be elbowed in the streets, in any throng, and never be distinguished.

More than that, it was slightly agitating to discover that the credit was not all on her side. They were so direct with her and so grateful. She never went home with their thanks fresh in mind without feeling how their reception of her helped toward that equilibrium which sometimes seems to be the whole purpose of self, in its Pilgrim's Progress, to discover and possess. But in another way they awoke

thoughts that were disturbing. Candor her new analysis had selected from the bunch of human virtues as supremely admirable. She felt that it must always have been a subconscious choice, though her competence for scientific discrimination, for bottling and labeling, was recent. And to be candid with one's self was most imperative of all. Consequently it was impossible to suppress the question of the right of her relation to these conventional wrongdoers. Where was the ethical basis for her position in society? That was the kernel of it. Why should she and the other well-intentioned Lady Managers be so favored by Heaven that for nothing that they had thought or done or deserved, for no virtue but the accident of birth, they should have the privilege of dispensing charity? The supreme privilege, no question. The need for charity at all seemed at once, to her fresh young point of view, to denounce the privilege of class, and to point mockingly to an illogical social system. And the illogical necessity is such a hard wrong to bear!

No; she was obliged to confess that the heroic ideal demanded of these women and wherein they had failed was even less in the possession of the superior ladies. One avoided the picture of their conduct should the trial by fire be suddenly decreed for them. The admirable exceptions to ordinary human error, weakness, and stupidity were just as rare in their ranks, and the exception certainly failed to prove the

general rule, just as when the great crime of slavery came to answer at the bar, the poor little arguments, pushed for all they were worth, about the Good Master, withered under the scorching blast of Truth.

What use, though, in such thoughts, when the very people who saw what she saw, kindly, helpful, high-minded co-workers, one and all, for all their very sincere activity, their whole-hearted devotion, yet seemed as unable to comprehend as those who lived a thousand years ago would be to grasp our most familiar language?

One of her later conversations with Mary Ethridge illustrated this. They had one day completed a visit to the Home together and were waiting in the matron's room for that official's advent. They stood by the desk in the pleasant little appartment where geraniums bloomed and were together turning over a book of cases.

"If only the Fair is a success," said Mary, "what with the amount we've been able to put by and invest from other sources, I should think we'd almost be able to enlarge."

"What did they make at the Toy Theater last week?"

"They did very well. Alice Fairchild's dancing always attracts. I think your sister-in-law — she's treasurer now, you know — said something like fifteen hundred dollars."

"How far does that go?"

"Oh, every little helps. Altogether Jack Beekman, who is our business man, has invested about thirty thousand dollars. If you once start to build with a nest-egg like that, people can usually be persuaded, by the sweat of one's brow, to put up the rest."

"Do they need so much larger a plant?" Janet asked, looking around.

Everything seemed very new and she knew the building was only eight years old. Outside, through the open window, over the geraniums, one saw a delightful yard enclosed from a prying public by brick walls already trailed with vines just putting forth leaves, and there were half a dozen apple trees which resembled gigantic, redolent bunches of arbutus.

"Don't you know what a waiting-list we always have?" Mary returned.

"How big?"

"At least twenty-five women a month are turned away — and that with our strict regulation not to admit second offenders."

"I suppose they're looked after somewhere," Janet slanted.

Mary shrugged her shoulders. "The state or city institutions. With politics you know what that means."

"Are there always so many?"

"The average is nearly constant — if anything, rises slowly," Mary replied, turning the pages before her.

Janet looked out of the bright window, but her imagination saw beyond the warm sunshine and the perfumed blossoms into the corners of the city that are always foul, whatever the season, off even into lonely country districts where there is sunshine in plenty, but for women a life that is monotonous and gray.

"Does n't it strike you as strange, Mary," she said at last, "that, with all the widespread charity and all the effort and all the modern agitation for uplift, that average should remain constant?"

Mary raised her eyes from the case-book just for a moment. She was well dressed and attractive and her delicately blonde face had lines of kindness which were already deepening. Yet it seemed to Janet that her eyes were like those of the blind.

"I suppose the population increases," said Mary, with a vaguely puzzled look. "Or perhaps it's because we reach farther. I think that's what Dr. Graves says." A sudden idea seemed to come to her rescue. "If the cases decreased," she said, "we should certainly seem to be a failure."

"It's paradoxical," Janet murmured, but she did not attempt to explain.

At that moment, too, the matron, Miss Hewes, in a gray uniform, entered. As a member with Mary of Dr. Graves's church, she turned intimately to her after a greeting for Janet. As she spoke she panted and pressed her hand upon an ample bosom.

"I've been running upstairs," she said, laughing and nodding her head. "That's how I get my exercise."

"If it's dinner-time," said Mary, "as I suspect it is, don't let us keep you waiting."

"It's I've been keeping you ladies, I'm afraid," returned Miss Hewes.

She took up a pamphlet from the desk and fanned herself.

"I love the spring," she declared, continuing to nod, "and yet the first warm weather does take it out of us fleshy folks."

When she had got her breath with a few more gasps, she went on to say that that same girl, Agnes Price, had been worrying her downstairs.

"She just is my thorn in the flesh, that one," she said cheerfully. "We never had her like."

"The one who lost the baby?" Janet asked, with a sudden flash of recollection.

The energy of the matron's caputal motions increased.

"The very same. Dr. Andrews went down on the records as attending her, while as a matter of fact, it happened that one of his cases in town, a private case that was n't due, suddenly had to call him off, — and he sent his assistant, Dr. Mayhew. He's one of the best young men out of the hospital last year — but the complications turned out to be quite out of the ordinary. It was hard on him. To tell the truth, I

thought he did first-rate to pull the girl through herself, putting aside the baby. It was one of those times that happen now and again when there's too much for one operator to manage. The poor fellow was all in. He told me when he came next that he weighed himself that night and found he'd lost four pounds."

"I remember," interposed Mary, whose weakness, if it deserved the name, was a rather breathless attitude toward great names. "It was Mrs. Ogden Abbott's confinement. She depends on Dr. Andrews."

"Then you do think the baby might have been saved?" Janet persisted.

The matron looked surprised, as at an indiscretion, and glancing first at Mary Ethridge as if in search for a cue, finally replied, "Well, yes and no, Mrs. Slade. A specialist of the first rank like Dr. Andrews might have succeeded, and then again, he might n't. I was right at hand and I know Dr. Mayhew did his best."

"It happened unfortunately," said Mary. The pink spots that so easily burned in her fair cheeks when she was emotionally disturbed now gave their danger signals.

The matron picked off several dead leaves and flowers from the geraniums.

"Well, between you and me, Miss Ethridge," she said with sudden vehemence, "and in spite of all the theories, the mother's usually a sight better off here when that does happen. She goes out with a better chance by far, and no mistake."

"Then why has this Agnes Price a grievance?" asked Janet, and she threw forth the question with a touch of irony in her own despite.

Not only was her intention far from antagonistic to Miss Hewes; on the contrary, she admired the woman and her useful, energetic, genial qualities. But these categorical habits of mind which the social worker, whether professional or amateur, seemed unable to avoid, were so inhuman. The very woman who could throw herself into exhaustive work unsparingly, into the cause of alleviation, could be so adamantine where human capriciousness refused to be generalized. And the thought of that doctor, with his rich patient for whose sake a life had perhaps been wasted, thereby desolating a heart! Not that she attached the slightest shadow of blame to him. He could not have been expected to act otherwise. No one would have. He could not have known what was coming. Even had there been time to think, the arguments would have perhaps been overwhelmingly with him. The one patient had a claim. No; it was not his conduct that had been unfair, but the general injustice of things, the pigeonholing of Agnes Price by Destiny as obviously of the lesser consideration. If the doctor had but flicked a coin one would have had no complaint.

"What does the girl come back here for?" Mary asked with a certain tact before Miss Hewes had made up her mind to be ruffled.

"Well, if you only knew her," said the matron, now quite distinctly addressing herself to Miss Ethridge as if she scented something foreign in the other visitor's attitude. "She beats everything."

She laughed obesely with equanimity restored. "As far as I can make out she comes back mostly to lecture me like a Dutch uncle. Talked about bringing a suit at first. Has the law at her tongue's end like the professors. She's so glib and fresh I can't make out the half of the stuff she gets off." Miss Hewes's already watery eyes were now almost brimming over with amusement. "Gave up the suit—why do you suppose? Because the lawyers were too cheap a bunch for her to associate with!"

The matron rocked back and forth on the edge of the chair where she had perched her stout, short-legged body. She applied a handkerchief from a pocket in the front of her white skirt first to one eye and then the other. "Well, she does just tickle my funny-bone, for all the bother," she went on. "She tries to make me laugh, that girl, every time she comes, I begin to think. And yet, she's in bitter earnest too. One don't know how to take her, nor I never saw her like."

Here the matron lowered her voice and projected in a loud stage-whisper, "And now, you know, the poor thing's in the same way again!"

A shadow passed over Miss Hewes's face. She hesitated before making an apology which she evidently

considered culpable because inconsistent with the categorical standard.

"I don't know what you'll think, Miss Ethridge, when I tell you that for all that and for all the rules I've given her work here now and again, scrubbing, when there's any to be done. She don't seem to have any real means of support."

"Is that why she's here to-day? Is she here now I mean?" Janet asked.

"She's just helping in the kitchen to-day," the matron still apologized. "When the house is so full — when the cases are so bad that we have to get extra nurses in, like now, we really need another help."

"I'd like to see her," Janet urged.

"It's half-past twelve," Mary Ethridge demurred.

It was necessary for her to wait for Janet, or rather for Janet's automobile, and she did not fancy disarrangements of her personal comfort.

"I want particularly to see her," Janet returned positively. "I won't be long."

"She'll be hard at work, as the dinner's going on," remarked Miss Hewes, leading the way, while Mary, who, curiously, considering, did not like actual contact with unpleasant cases, hovered behind.

In the kitchen where the clatter vied in vehemence with the smell of strong, plain food, Miss Hewes called to a tall girl with a great coil of brown hair wound many times about her head and a large, snaky curl plastered down to her cheeks beneath each ear,

the question-mark-lock fashion that happened to be in vogue: a powerful, full-blooded type like the Normandy peasants. As she approached with a long little-finger nail inserted dubiously between her teeth, and eyes that snapped, Janet thought that here at last was really one who looked the part of being both bold and bad.

"This lady, Mrs. Slade, wants to see you, Agnes," said the matron with a propitiatory air.

Agnes did not move her head from its obviously assumed pose. She held it at a swanlike angle back from her broad, flat shoulders, chin tilted, the attitude by which the movie-heroine depicts aristocratic pride. She eyed Janet with the intentness which is described as "staring one down" until Miss Hewes became uncomfortable.

"I wanted to know you from what I've heard," was Janet's attempt.

The girl only folded her arms slowly, dramatically, with a still more impressive hauteur.

"Say something, Agnes," Miss Hewes prompted.

"Do you want me to, sure?" asked the girl, diverting her attention momentarily to the matron. The corners of her lips twitched with peculiar dimples when she moved them.

"Well — I think so," returned the matron with half-amused hesitation.

"Then, I want to know whether she's writing up the Institutions for the 'Sunday American' or

just a common or garden charity bummer," said the girl.

"Agnes!" the matron exclaimed.

But Janet smiled. Here was an individual who scorned blandishments, whose originality the grinding mill had failed to crush. She must have courage. One could imagine her starving rather than cringe.

"Your second choice is the nearest," she said, meeting the girl eye for eye.

But it was plain that Mary Ethridge was horrified and anxious to be gone.

"I'll see you again," Janet said. She held out her hand, surprised at the keenness of her own impulse.

The girl looked at the hand, then at the matron as if she rather suspected a game, then at the hand again and finally put her own into it.

"I don't do that to every one," she said.

Outside, the jolly matron was again bubbling.

"I'm that sorry, Mrs. Slade," said she. "It's most unseemly. But that kid, for she's not much more, is just play-acting all the time. I think she believed she was Mrs. Wilson's self holding out her hand to you. And she the dregs!"

Janet felt that she saw deeper. On the way to the door she asked about Agnes's history.

"She says her father was an English duke, and her mother a Polish singer," Miss Hewes giggled. "Her mother gave up her calling to bring her over here where she raised her by giving music-lessons until

she died. After that Agnes was left in the lurch. She saw service, I believe, a low kind of hotel service. That's the tale she tells, but there's nothing she likes better than getting away with a good one."

Later, Mary Ethridge could not resist a reproof by implication, while Janet's automobile bore them toward the Back Bay.

"Miss Hewes has disappointed me in this Price girl's case," she said. "She's let her feelings override her better judgment. Besides, I don't think it's quite honest to evade the rule. Admitting her now as a servant is just an evasion. I shall bring it up at the next meeting."

"What would you consider the right course?" Janet asked.

"There are so many who are deserving and grateful. This girl has once been lifted from the gutter, cared for, and given a glimpse of better things. She has had her chance and missed it. She's impudent and spoiled besides. If any must be left to the mercy of the city authorities her type is certainly the one we can best dispense with."

Mary closed her mouth with a snap like that of a mouse-trap, and Janet, conceding her higher authority, felt the incident closed. Yet it was strange, after all, that Mary Ethridge, unintelligent in the old days at school, should be one of those whom Fate had selected to sit in the judgment-seat.

CHAPTER V

A CLOSED incident in so far as it concerned the Board of Lady Managers of the Heath Rescue Home was indeed the affair of Agnes Price. Her dismissal therefrom even as scrub-woman or scullery-maid was unanimously voted at the last meeting of the year, and voted, too, with uncommon expedition for the reason that most of the members were already at their country estates and the few present were in a hurry. Miss Hewes, too, was to be advised by the next visitor to be thenceforth more circumspect. But for Janet the episode proved the opening of a vivid book.

In spite of the girl's obstinacy and cantankerousness, which took a malicious delight in being shocking, Janet was obstinately convinced that it was just the reaction of a vigorous nature toward the compression of abnormal conditions and that at the source was to be found a pure and vital spring not yet defiled.

She persisted without encouragement in following, as close as her own life would allow, the girl's trail from one cheap lodging-house to another, among surroundings which, if possible, deteriorated as Agnes's earning-power decreased, so that by the time the autumn came and the girl's critical hour approached, she unearthed her one day in a room

below the street on the alley called Cambridge Street Place.

This refuge, which looked upwards through a grating at the brick wall of the Charles Street jail, not ten feet distant, was to be had at perhaps as low a rent as anything in the city, save possibly at the almshouse or the prison itself. The wooden building was ramshackle and the alley a kind of forgotten purlieu, debouching upon Cambridge Street — Cambridge Street with its rum-shops and their crop of staggering men, whose mud the tires of fine motor-cars shook disgustedly off in their passage to the North Station. Nevertheless, it was necessary for Agnes, now quite unable to work, to share it with two young daughters of the couple to whom, with the room immediately above, it temporarily belonged.

The dampness of this abode did not appear to affect her health and her youthful exuberance was still triumphant; but her spirit now showed the effect of suffering and was not so hopelessly impermeable to sympathy.

And Janet was persistent. The wholesale censure of Mary Ethridge and the other Managers acted upon her like a challenge. She found herself surprisingly dependent upon the faith that she had put into this problem and her own successful treatment of it. The fact that she was working independently on the spur of an intense human impulse, defiant of Theories and their offspring Rules, added a stimulus. She was con-

vinced, without perhaps so formulating her conviction, yet with an antagonistic emotion not unknown to others before her, that the word Type was just as pernicious as the word Case, that both ought to be banished from the vocabulary of brotherly love, and in spite of her short experience, or because of it, felt enthusiastically on her mettle to furnish the proof.

Agnes seemed to her neither a degenerate, bound to fall to the bottom like a stone cast into a puddle, nor a rebel whose perversity it was a waste of time to deal with, and who according to the Theory of Individual Responsibility owed a debt to society. Rather, her youthful imagination pictured her as a jewel of price embedded in the clay and waiting for the appreciative hand (which was, of course, her own) to extricate it.

The comparison was certainly not inapt as one descended into the cave-like chamber to find this glowing inmate, but as the days went on its suitability became less conspicuous, for the girl's brightness was obviously fading.

"I don't believe you ever go out, Agnes," Janet ventured once.

Agnes had neither risen at her entrance nor vouchsafed any greeting, but had continued to rock listlessly in the one chair, a novel laid open upon her knee and with a general appearance of resenting the interruption.

"What'd I go out for?" she asked, watching sullenly while her visitor, in search of a seat, pushed

clear the corner of a trunk heaped with miscellaneous garments and crowned at the apex with a dangerously balanced plate of half-eaten viands.

"Well, I should n't think you'd want to stay here all the time," said Janet, who had not yet learned the phrases of discretion necessary in her new avocation.

"No, I guess you would n't want to stay here long," said the girl, continuing coolly to rock.

"But you need the fresh air. You ought to have it."

"Sure thing. I'd like to promenade in the sun-parlor first-rate, only there don't happen to be one. This palace was built in the old style."

"Are you afraid of falling?" Janet asked. "Is n't there some one who could go with you?"

"All me domestics is very much engaged," peeped the girl in an artificial high tone. "There's the silver to shine, y' know and all that." Then she suddenly dropped her voice and betrayed her stormy humor. "Look, how much'd you go out if the boys pasted mud and slanged you, not to speak of the drunks?"

"I'll take you for a drive now," said Janet emotionally.

"No, thanks!"

But Agnes's eyes betrayed her longing.

"Come on. Please. You will come with me!" cried the would-be benefactress, rejoiced at the mere hint of a softening.

But Agnes assumed again her protective cloak of sarcasm.

"With me coat an' hat gone to be repaired, I must really refuse the kind invitation."

Janet hunted impetuously among the rags, but failed to produce anything that would cover anybody. They seemed to be in fact the possessions of Agnes's youthful room-mates.

The girl watched her with evident amusement.

"Where *are* your coat and hat?" Janet had at last to demand.

"The rent has to be coughed up. They've gone to help."

"And you have nothing left, then?" The sordid contrivances of necessity!

Agnes shrugged her shoulders with a knowing look, and Janet, feeling that one approached the border of what she was determined should remain an unknown country, the girl's sinful relationships, changed the subject. But when she went, that time, she had wrung from Agnes a confession of anxiety about the future and the acceptance of a gift that would at least tide her over the impending crisis and keep her from Long Island. Inexpressive as the girl was, it seemed that one had driven the entering wedge.

Afterwards, in the hospital whose benefits Janet's munificence permitted her to enjoy for a more extended period than is customarily allotted to pauperism, and later, when she was housed with her baby in a better tenement, Agnes evinced an emotion which, though undoubtedly grudging, could be

hopefully described as nearing appreciation. At least she recognized her benefactor's right of approach and even confided her perplexity at the new difficulties which every onward step seemed to throw in her path.

In brief, there was the baby now to be supported and at the same time tended, facts that faced one another irreconcilably, primitively crude; and there was the baby's mother, of whom both necessities were required, hardly able at first to do either. One of Nature's pranks, it seemed, with women, to make inconceivable demands at the same time that she deprived them of strength! A nasty trick, like charging up a great fraudulent account to one already tottering on the brink of bankruptcy. And she accepted as needs must and without protest or apology, with a whimsically ironic half-thanks, the unrestricted provisions which seemed to Janet the only thinkable solution of the situation.

Right here Janet faced the crux of her own position as an independent philanthropist. Having adopted with youthful assurance the hypothesis that Charity is in essence a manifestation of social deformity, opposed by nature to the normally reciprocal interdependence of mankind, she yet, like many another idealist, found herself resorting to it willy-nilly as the indispensable makeshift.

And at this time she actually gloated in giving, as a callow boy, just discovering life, gloats in forbidden recklessness. The very fact that she was participat-

ing simultaneously in her husband's happy succession of achievements, that the caprice of fortune was throwing into such dramatic contrast the delights and security of her own life, made her the more ardent to be lavish.

But that she could not uninterruptedly remain the self-appointed arbiter of another's fate was unfortunately soon to be demonstrated.

One afternoon in mid-winter, when the light of day was already beginning to lengthen, she determined, after visiting Agnes in her new West End quarters, to return home, or rather, to her mother-in-law's, where they were now established, on foot. She made her way up the steep incline of Joy Street delighting in the exertion which accelerated her blood and made her cheeks burn against the zero air. Her breath floated about her like white smoke. She paused a moment on the top of the hill when from a side street one suddenly walked into her path whose importance was enhanced for her by a sentimental interest. It was Jerome Graves.

She would not have been surprised had he failed to remember the one occasion of their meeting as members of the Board of Managers of the Heath Rescue Home, but his memory was not so poor, for he took off his soft black hat with a long sweep.

"Lucky for me, Mrs. Slade. We seem to be going the same way!" he exclaimed. His dark eyes for all their dreaminess were intelligently searching too.

"I gather that you've been slumming," he went on as she civilly accepted his companionship. "In fact, a little bird has told me" (his smile was amicable and yet ever so slightly reproving) "that you are playing fairy godmother to that refractory case, the Price girl. I met her hereabouts the other day."

It was obvious that he invited confidences on the subject. More, he implied that the affair was one to which he had already given thought and about which he felt personal concern.

Janet, however, accustomed to the nominal doctrinary requirements of a Unitarian home training, was already embarrassed in the presence of the Cloth. Clergymen impressed her not so much as a class or a profession apart as a distinct species of humans. She had in her whole life exchanged very few words with any of them, and without having considered the subject would have believed them by instinct the last possible resort in a practical juncture. The taint of Rome with its incense seemed to her half-consciously, yet with almost the bigotry of the early Puritans, to cling about the sober vicarial garb. And in mental attitude too she expected she knew not what of mediæval, Jesuitical, and uncanny.

She dropped a polite but wary response, at the same time observing at a slant his sensitive, almost sensuous, though controlled, countenance. Their mutual interest in the topic of Agnes Price was overlaid for her by that gossip about Amelia. Amelia, with her

air of smooth conventionality and sophisticated self-possession, would seem, on the surface, an unexpected spark to ignite his breast. But that picture of love forlorn, love self-condemned to perpetual denial for a spiritual conviction's sake and the consecration to mystic things, was dramatically provoking to the imagination.

"You know," he said in his mellow voice, — and he had a way of looking at one, at least, at women, which no amount of diversity could ignore, — "I've taken the liberty of thinking about you a great deal of late, Mrs. Slade. I've been wishing so that you were one of my flock, or at least a fellow-communicant."

It was to be supposed that ecclesiastics were insidiously stalking for converts, rich converts, but she looked at him interrogatively.

"I've wanted an opening to come and talk to you," he explained. "This case you are befriending appears to me more and more in the light of a Test Case — and you, if you will pardon personalities, are the Typical Benefactress. No doubt it seems to you nobody's business if you choose to assist an unfortunate who has happened to appeal to you. If the Case were isolated, that might be true. But you very wealthy women scarcely seem to realize the impossibility of your isolation — your importance, your vivid prominence as belonging to the world's Favored Few, the far-reaching effect of all your acts, yes, and of all your

omissions. At present I do not refer to the incalculable weight of your example as an objective social factor, — the published accounts of all your doings avidly read by girls and women everywhere, — your portraits scattered abroad. . . . I confine myself to such activities of yours as the Case in point where you have the option of rightly or wrongfully dispensing the great power delegated to you. Please excuse me, but I feel it so intensely a public affair rather than the private concern I'm afraid it appears to you. It was apprehension of your attitude that has given me misgivings about seeking you out. Yet in spite of the displeasure I may be incurring, I censure myself for hesitancy in doing my duty."

He had in his hand a plain, heavy, English walking-stick and he seemed to emphasize his feelings by striking off with accurate strokes the knobs of ice on the badly cleared curb. He adjusted his hat, too, nervously, as he paused in speech. Both had accelerated their steps with the sharp decline toward the pleasant dwelling-district on the eastern slope of the Hill and were swinging along with the easy stride of individuals in the bloom of youth.

Janet felt it impossible to be annoyed with one so engaging and earnest. But she was mildly bored by his obviousness, his stereotyped point of view, ready-made, met with so universally among the Problem-tacklers. She had encountered it already not only in the Mary Ethridges of the Heath Home, but in

dozens of other Mary Ethridges on the other Boards which she had since been persuaded to join. Against this assumption of infallibility, which to one without the same traditions looked questionable and smug, not to say absurd in a world of things not more than half revealed, her common sense rebelled. She was too curious about him as a personality, however, to dampen their conversation.

"You don't approve of me?" she asked lightly, glancing at him with a mischievous smile and not sorry that her cheeks, she knew, were stimulating and brilliant in their glossy frame of fur.

"I don't like to say that," he replied. He took off his eyeglasses and wiped them and swung them from one finger.

"But your methods! Have n't you been impetuous, Mrs. Slade?"

He turned upon her now with the attack direct. "You've gone ahead without seeking a word of advice from people of experience. And the methods of the various organizations in this town are not to be despised, you know. We're proud of our charity, as far, of course, as a decent humility will permit. This is what I'm driving at. We really are trying to do our work here, in the undenominational organizations as well as in the Church, along the best modern lines, the fruit of the union of the most constructive thought and the greatest practical experimentation. You must see that it is rather impulsive and, if you'll ex-

cuse me, rather — rather youthful, to disregard precepts evolved so carefully."

"I suppose you allude in particular to the policy of the Heath Home about — about second offenders."

After all, this topic was delicate. But he evidently did not feel it so.

"Second offenders, certainly," he replied with confidence. "Not a fortuitous regulation, but the result of earnest purpose. Where should we end if charity itself encouraged this sort of thing? But that is n't all. — I am told that you have not investigated the girl's antecedents, — nor her family ties, — principles of first importance before taking a philanthropic step. Nor have I mentioned the primal measure of presenting religion as the great inspiration to right conduct. It is said that you prefer to ignore the causes of her degradation, — even, that you give of your bounty" (strange how the Scriptural phrase would crop out) "without consulting established scales of minimum amounts."

Janet could not refrain from wondering who in this instance had impersonated the little bird. Her imagination somehow failed to limn sharply those suspected confidential scenes between him and Amelia. Whether they took place in vestries or drawing-rooms remained vague.

"My shortcomings are really not quite so bad, Dr. Graves," she said, willfully maintaining her light manner. "Agnes has relatives whom she makes no

mystery of. In fact, it's regrettable, but she's shamelessly frank in her opinion of them. A much older brother, I believe, grown up when she was a baby. Drinks. A married cousin who used to be kind. Naturalized, not native. Her stories differ. Anyway, they've cast her off absolutely. I can't see any possible good in bringing them in — I mean I'm sure it would only be painful to make overtures to them about her."

"That's only a detail," Dr. Graves said, waving his hand, "a detail that may happen in this Case to be insignificant, but it is a recognized method of preliminary procedure, and my point is your neglect of recognized methods, Mrs. Slade, even apart from your patronizing at all, wasting your good offices on a Case that clearly belongs in the domain of the public officials."

"Do you withhold the ministrations of the Church from persons whom you classify as hopeless?" Janet asked.

"Now, that's just the distinction that I should like you to perceive," the clergyman said, his ardor seeming to beam through his eyes. "Spiritual grace knows no discouragement and may persist even unto the ninety-ninth time to reach forth toward the soul of the transgressor, but spiritual grace does not interfere with practical treatment which is the realm of a special science. However this girl might have erred and wherever fallen, I should hope to penetrate,

provided she would accept the Church, of course. I should exhort her, pray with her, hope at last to bring her to the light, but I should certainly refrain from giving her one cent against the dictates of expert judgment while institutions expressly existing for her type are ready to provide her with subsistence. It is unnecessary to mention the contagion of vice that an incorrigible may spread if kept at large. And you don't want to make things easy for such arrogance, either, Mrs. Slade. She made game of the Home's efforts in her behalf, it appears, and returned them accusations instead of gratitude. Consequences sometimes act as the best deterrent for the future. The consequences must not be too soft."

They were by this time descending the open, aristocratic street with its broad view across the Common, now gleaming white except where the interlacing shadows of the trees strung webs in indigo along the malls. The houses towering straight and steep were known to them both, and either marked the sites of earlier mansions vitally identified with the nation's history or themselves harked back to days of the long ago, quaint, unchanged, with high steps, colonial façades, and a few possessing much-prized windows with large panes tinted bizarrely, although pellucid, in variegated purple, and breathing a generation-old tradition. A street that belonged among the world's streets that have become personified and leap into mind like a friend's face, and at this hour in the after-

noon — for its appearance varied with the time like its patrons' — distinctly at its best. A friendly hour when the stream of tired business men begins to flow back from "downtown" toward a sunset silhouetted by their houses, smiling, anticipatory business men; when rosy-cheeked, magnificently clad babies are being brought in by snobbish nursemaids from a long day's airing in the cold; when still more expensively dressed ladies are entering or leaving their limousines or ambling in vivacious groups. Yet "ambling" is inappropriate, for nearly every one moved hurriedly; no one lingered, as in a foreign street, no beggars, no real street denizens — no movable object stayed long in the picture. There was a bobbing of motion and of change. And as the passers were mostly known to Janet or Dr. Graves, their salutations, if characteristically constrained, were highly upsetting to a sustained discussion.

Whether Janet would have cared, then and there, to pursue the subject was also questionable. The clergyman's point of view, his disapproval, disturbed her. In spite of her avowed independence, the weight of authority behind him impressed her more than she cared to acknowledge. The principles of insubordinate thinking and insubordinate acting were the thorns to him, she knew. And preposterous as his attack must seem to one who now felt herself a real champion of Sincerity and Truth, she scented an indubitable Essence of Reality — if mysterious, if transcendental

—in the to her unknown background of his position. One suspected that the realm of Real Things, after all, might extend beyond the actual domain of the senses. Her assurance was shaken to the point of almost believing her attitude toward the formulated superstition she had felt his cloth to represent to have been improper. It was almost a matter for shame, like laughter in observing the multitude who press with their lips the greasy marble of St. Peter's toe in the Holy Basilica.

On the other hand, it was impossible to suppress the doubt that Dr. Graves's interference with her perfectly harmless beneficence might possibly not be a matter of principle as a social worker or a churchman, might actually be an excuse for an attempt to proselytize. And this would be intolerable.

She was puzzled what to say further. But while they cut through at Clarendon Street into Marlborough she shook her head at his denial of the practical value of any work not built on an orthodox cornerstone, and replied ruefully, like a good-hearted but stubborn child, "I'm not convinced. I hate not to have changed your bad opinion, but in this case, as the Test Case you have called it, I feel my perfectly impulsive conduct justified, ten thousand times more justified than all the scientific, unemotional charity in the world."

He stretched out his hands, cane and all, in a clerical gesture of despair, but he said: "I have not fin-

ished with you, Mrs. Slade. The very fact that you are so obstinate makes me yearn to bring you to us. You could make a bulwark of enlightened organization."

Before the door of the Slade house and for some distance along the street stood automobiles and carriages.

"Amelia is having a musicale for the benefit of the Blind Orphans under the auspices of the Anti-Suffrage Society," she said with sudden recollection. "Won't you come in?"

But he took off his hat with an air of positive negation and left her with the threat, "Another day!"

An invisible, watchful agent opened the door as she entered the vestibule and she stepped instantly into an atmosphere of festivity.

In the stiff little room flanking the door and resembling corresponding rooms in numerous neighboring houses, elaborate chairs and tables faced each other with no higher ostensible purpose than the holding of coats and hats, a function which they performed with the dismal air of resignation of those in whom ambition is dead. It was necessary, she felt, to examine her appearance before plunging into the throng upstairs. Its numbers could be divined even here from the creaking of chairs and the shuffling of feet and programmes, mysteriously audible in spite of a powerful soprano voice rending the air with its tones of passion. And the furs and coats here lying about indicated the quality of dress one might expect.

The mirror showed her one who for all the simplicity of her present attire might well grace any company. It was a relief, after the visit to Agnes which was never agreeable for its own sake, and after the perplexities of Dr. Graves's censure, to push aside for the present altruistic endeavor and arguments on general principles. It was pleasant to contemplate in one's self something vivid and graceful and desirable, pleasant; and yet, as she adjusted her hair with a nimble touch and turned toward the stairs, it was not a consciousness of these things so much as gratification for the fact that she looked older and more *mondaine* that filled her soul with joy.

While the present offering on the fastidious musical menu was being executed, she observed the scene from the seat into which she had unobtrusively slipped. Here in the hall she was among the overflow of the guests while the greater number were crowded into the drawing-room on the frail gilt chairs with crimson seats which caterers provide. Their faces were universally turned toward the pale young woman in the green china-silk who faced them from in front of the fireplace holding between her knees a 'cello, ungainly instrument for women. At her left, in a "posed" attitude, sat a lady of at least forty, with hair obviously enlivened by art, a very large bust, and very accentuated clothes, all of which items, not to speak of the scroll in her hand, seemed to proclaim her the Prima Donna just applauded. So great was her name that

she could afford to smile placidly upon the little *ingénue* the while her eyes roved without restraint through the wealthy gathering. To balance the picture the performer was supported on the other side by a swarthy man, fiercely mustached, his ears in his collar and a violin tenderly tucked, with the protection of a silk handkerchief, under his arm.

Of the audience itself, composed of Prominent People in the proportion of one man to sixteen women, the impression presented was a staggering one of superfluity, redundancy. There was nothing in any listener to suggest abstraction, relaxation, self-forgetfulness in the really inspired performance. Everybody appeared not only tense, but in some way exaggerated, either too obese, or too tired, or too intellectually projected, or (this preponderated) too weighted down with expensive clothes and regalia. From such a nervously self-conscious assemblage one could not imagine even the most ethereal spirit finding a chance to soar. But it was one of Amelia's propensities, even on ticketed occasions like this, to gather under the parental roof people with big pearls, big houses, big incomes, or inflated reputations.

To all this bigness the Slade residence, which had belonged to the family since the Back Bay emerged from the waters, extended a determined but comparatively exiguous welcome. Its yellow oak woodwork which, wherever it found the opportunity, expressed itself in stalactites terminated by spherical

knobs, thus recalling the Oriental *bizarreries* of the era destined for all time to defame, æsthetically, the glory of the Empress-Queen, was draped at the high doors and windows with massive hangings. The furniture was chiefly of mahogany chiseled with grapes and pears and plums. Odd pieces, however, broke the monotony, — an inlaid high-boy, a spider-legged table, a blue velvet armchair, some elaborate fixtures of brasswork, siltage from family tributaries whence legacies had washed up here and there. The pictures were as incongruous, — prints of Landseer, indifferent etchings of Roman ruins, rubbing elbows with a real Corot and a Teniers. In the chimney-piece the fancy of the original owner showed itself in black marble seamed with white and ochre. His own bust, too, in Parian, looked down, rather larger than life-size, from a high pedestal that dominated stairs and hall.

This hodge-podge of household effects, retained both for sentimental and economic reasons, frankly execrated by Osborne, who had said that it "set his teeth on edge," and "gave him the jim-jams," had nevertheless acquired, in the course of use and years, a certain dignity and tone that were indescribable and almost masqueraded as tastefulness. Also the temporary but potent touches of a discriminating hand in matters of lamp-shades, table-covers, and vases of flowers, in a subtle way threw the old-time ugliness back, converted it, rather, into a setting of hallowed associations.

Heroic of Amelia, nevertheless, to invite to these precincts such patrician stock as that of the Means, Higbee, or Soames families. Amelia's personality was in itself a tower of social strength. She had the capacity, but for obstacles of date and sex, for tactical achievements of which George Washington himself need not have been ashamed. Hers was an attitude of cool disregard for difficulties so dauntless as to annihilate them. For all the handicap of the insignificant income on which they were obliged to subsist, bequeathed exclusively to her mother, who thus became fortified with the whip hand, — for the additional impediment of that mother herself, pronounced by Society a Bore, — she managed to hold her own among The Elect.

The present occasion was, however, one on which Mrs. Slade the dowager was an asset rather than an obligation. She had clung for years to the Vice-Presidency of the Anti-Suffragists as a badge of conservatism akin to a patent of nobility. Rather pathetic, that insistence of the surviving Victorians on their stodgy ideal of ladyhood, their belief in the Divine Right of their comfortable possessions, in the security of their unearned privileges, in their almost royal claim to exist in seclusion from public responsibilities on the mere justification of worship to the goddess Refinement, a divinity whom, incidentally, like other historic idolaters, they frequently contrived to hoodwink. Still, there is a satisfaction in feeling that the

People of Class are with you and a more noble gratification in serving an ideal which, for all its out-of-dateness, has, like most things, a saving grace. The modern house-cleaning of ancient standards, whatever rubbish it has dedicated to the incinerator, has at the same time pried into hallowed corners and dragged ruthlessly under the microscope keepsakes of sentimental value whose mere analysis is a desecration. If Mrs. Slade was a bore, yet she venerated Modesty, Daintiness, Domesticity, Pure Conversation, and above all, Family. She deplored the flashy persons — or she considered them flashy — whom Amelia brought to the house impartially (so long as they were The Thing) along with The Elect. She was willing to work herself to the bone (an increasing task as the years advanced) to keep the Right People on top of the social caldron which she hazily but passionately imaged, and in devoting herself to Anti-Suffrage it somehow seemed an effort in their behalf. Her enthusiasm, especially on such an occasion as this where the Cause had stolen a march on its adversaries by luring in the Noncommittal under the pretext of serving Charity, was felt and appreciated.

When the programme came to an end and the musicians dissolved among the ecstatic crowd, Mrs. Slade stood centrally in front of the stair-railing, and, beckoning Janet to her side, did the duties of hostess in a way which must have warmed the heart of

Amelia from her own vantage-point in the drawing-room. Persons of a younger generation, who irreverently alluded to her by habit as "Cousin Susie Slade" without a legitimate claim, from a propensity of hers for emphasizing the most remote (if aristocratic) relationships, were affable about the music, the Blind Orphans, the Anti-Suffrage Cause, the appearance of Amelia, even, in desperation, about the day, as if for that, too, the hostess were responsible. But all were effusive upon being introduced to Janet, —hovering about her with sharp glances, —wondering, she knew, what kind of a young thing this was whom the personable Osborne had married.

For there were comparatively few, in all this time, of Amelia's and Mrs. Slade's *entourage* whom Janet had encountered. If younger members of these families moved within her orbit, intimacy was confined to those who had also chosen the country for residence. Their elders, from forty to, say, seventy years, circulated by preference in town. The circumstances of her marriage and her father's death had prevented acceptance of the numerous invitations to their large houses where Osborne, seemingly, in the old days had roamed at large.

But as the throng separated into groups, merged again for tea, and finally trickled entirely away, familiar individuals did present themselves.

Among them a smiling, beautiful person with intimate eyes.

"You don't remember me, Mrs. Slade," she said with quick dimples and an air of mischief.

Janet did remember in a flash, in spite of their single meeting and the contrast between the mannish riding-clothes and this handsome gown cut very low.

"Mrs. Lansing, — of course I do!" she exclaimed, vaguely embarrassed. How long ago it seemed, that day! How developed since then the interests of life! How much more vivid her vision of herself and other people! This was an individual, this woman, she felt, who somehow made one more conscious of such things. The look in her eyes was as personal, as suggestive, as a kiss.

"You must n't forget me," said Mrs. Lansing, laughing, before she turned away, "because I've become a neighbor of yours in Wyndham, you know. Permanent! I've taken a house there."

When all had gone Mrs. Slade subsided with some care on to one of the fragile chairs.

"How much do you think you took in, Amelia?" she asked, with the sigh of accomplished effort, followed by a covert yawn.

"Two hundred and fifty tickets were sold, as I told you before," rejoined Amelia, already turning out electric lights. She could not be conceived of as ever nervous or annoyed, but even she could not help manifesting a slight reaction after the polite tension of the last two hours. "Five dollars apiece, and all but Van Elsen gave their performances. She can't

be grudged. A picked chicken. But I don't think they all came."

Her tone was as abstracted and devoid of solicitude on behalf of the Blind Orphans or the Anti-Suffrage Cause as if no such worthy objects existed. An inscrutable person who seemed forever coldly busied with affairs that she regarded coldly! Fresh from her encounter with that zealous young clergyman, Janet wondered more than ever. After all, whichever way one turned in the pilgrimage of existence one found mysteries confronting one.

"It was nice of Aunt Marian to come, I'm sure," murmured Mrs. Slade reminiscently. "She says she's hardly left her bed this winter, but since it was here and for the Antis she'd have had to struggle out if it'd been her last hour. Blood is thicker than water after all. And she's musical herself. What a voice she used to have! I can remember how she sang 'Home, Sweet Home,' to the Prince of Wales, King Edward that was, when he visited here in the sixties. I was a little girl then. It was odd, I think now, — the title of the song, I mean, — but nobody seemed to notice. I liked this Madame Doria to-day too. — Oh, Amelia" (her tone changed to one of resentment). "Have n't I asked you not to have that fast Mrs. Ogden to the house? And no doubt the Mrs. Lansing with her is a bird of the same feather. But, to be sure, with these new fashions you can't tell the ladies from the *demi-monde!*"

Amelia shrugged her shoulders indifferently and continued to restore order to the rooms. Janet helped her return things to their normal positions and to shove the rented chairs to one side.

"You never answer me, Amelia," Mrs. Slade complained. But before she could enlarge on this point an interruption occurred in the shape of Osborne, who ascended the stairs with a remarkably noiseless tread for so stalwart a man and appeared in their midst with the suddenness of a veritable Olympian. He was boyishly smiling.

"Oh, we did hope you'd come in before it was all over, Osborne," his mother fretted. "Madame Doria was wonderful and so were the others."

"You're later than usual," Amelia remarked.

Osborne's lips continued to twitch with such irresistible mirth, which he seemed now trying to hide by stroking his mustache, that Janet, who had stepped gladly forward to meet him, cried inquisitively, facing him at a foot's disadvantage, "What on earth is the matter, Osborne?"

"Nothing," he said, composing his face. "I've been seeing off some of Amelia's naughty guests."

"Mrs. Lansing?" came from Amelia, with a quick glance.

"And Mrs. Ogden," he returned, now giving up the attempt to be sedate, and grinning openly.

"It must have been exhilarating," said Amelia.

"Do tell us what it is," Janet said, feeling the con-

tagion of his amusement, and, putting her hands in his, trying to elevate herself to him on tiptoe.

"Oh, nothing. Just a joke," he replied, not meeting her eyes. But suddenly he put his arm around her and carried her bodily, laughing at her protests and Amelia's raised eyebrows and his mother's exclamations, up the high flight of stairs and into their room, where he deposited her upon the bed breathless and seeking for hairpins and feeling as if something rather improper had happened. (Rather gratifying, though, to have a husband who could do that.)

"We must be quiet," she panted, with the thought always uppermost in her mind. "It's nearly seven. I wonder if poor Augustus managed to get to sleep." But her second thought tumbled out after it. "Have you known this Mrs. Lansing long?" she asked.

"An old flame of mine," he said. "In Washington long ago — and in Paris."

He had discarded coat and waistcoat and was standing before the cheval glass, a hand-mirror in hand with which he pensively examined his receding locks. Her eyes met his indefinitely in the glass.

"She interests me," Janet said. "She seems rather fascinating. She tells me that she's come to live out our way."

Osborne did not seem surprised, and indeed he explained that the newcomer had been looking about for a dwelling-place that time last year, in the week she had spent at the Beekmans'.

"Since the trouble about her husband she's rather uprooted, I fancy."

"What trouble?" Another drama in this world of surprising people?

"Oh — he drank. Disappeared."

"How horrible for her!" Janet cried. There was a sensational interest in the subject which fascinated her in spite of herself.

"Oh, let's let her alone!" Osborne said, turning from the mirror with his hands in his pockets, and sauntering toward the bed. "She was the devil of a jilt."

He sat down on the bed beside her.

"A jilt!" Janet cried. "Did she jilt you?"

"Yes, and all the rest until she took up with Lansing. Come, let's forget her," he reiterated, putting his hand on his wife's bare arm and making an obvious effort to regain his high spirits. "How much do you love me?"

But — Osborne jilted! This was a new thought, altered the complexion of things, seemed to merit cogitation. She looked past him absently, unconscious of herself and forgetful of his presence.

He rose from her side with a slight shrug.

"Oh!" he cried, though almost facetiously, "for a spark of temperament!" — and strode to his dressing-room to prepare for dinner.

But the word "temperament" buzzed in her mind like a fly in a closed room.

CHAPTER VI

In the months intervening before the Slades' return to their own big house in Wyndham, Janet found the demands and complications of life multiplying more and more. Osborne's importunities and indeed her own inclination had finally persuaded her to discard the last weeds for Augustus Bulyon and to plunge into society to an extent not formerly dreamt of. Osborne's prestige as a legislator, which had somehow converted him in people's minds from a dashing dilettante to a possible great statesman of the future, combined with her money (indispensable alloy) and, incontestably, her charm, made them very much desired. They both enjoyed it, while to Janet there was the additional spice of novelty, not diminished by her recent curious awakening to things. Her tongue somehow had become loosened, had acquired the art of "drawing people out." Occasions where, as a *débutante*, she would have sat dull, unstimulated, and unsought, were rich with interest. Behind the kaleidoscopic faces and scenes among which she moved she seemed to detect enchanting mysteries of motive and emotion. Was this appreciation a sign of incipient "temperament" in her, she wondered, reverting ever and anon to the mystic word? When she asked Osborne if it were, he shook his head, laughing. At

least it was like re-reading in years of experience a thrilling romance and discovering how little of it had that first time been emotionally perceived.

Nor, for all the engagements incidental to a social life, did she permit herself to neglect the charitable enterprises that she was associated with. Rather, her activity in this direction, too, augmented. The fact of her accessibility in town instigated people to make many demands that she might otherwise have escaped, and her conscience was very sensitive, — far more so she found than the general one. A beast of a conscience! It insisted not only upon contemplating the strange disparities in human opportunity, privilege, fortune, and fate, but refused to allow her to be peacefully inactive about it. She felt the uneasiness of a perpetual indebtedness. On the gayest occasions such figures as that of Agnes Price would not infrequently insistently present themselves.

It was curious, she thought, how little such phantoms disturbed the dancing others, strange that people could accept with equanimity life and more, senseless luxury, at an expense they did not pay. Of those she met there was seldom one who, by sweat of the brow, by talents, by inspiration, would have been able to earn in fair conditions a place of even minor distinction. She heard it admitted frequently enough!

Strange, too, that in a world where justification was demanded for most things, none should be required in this essential matter. In the churches which

she began to sample with great eagerness, right behavior and a proper disposal of one's wealth were recommended, but a bolder man than any of these prelates would apparently hesitate to cry out on the shame of such wealth existing. Why, then, should this proud caste dominate, seeing that riches did mysteriously engender pride? Could it claim the ideal of the old paternalism, the source of aristocracy, that Dominance of the Best, who in a simple era were wont to reciprocate the service of dependents, the tribute of tenants, with responsible and intimate guidance? Could it claim that patrician distinction of being a valuable asset to the country through wisdom, loyalty, valor? Or, even by the test of the new individualism, what claim had it? The self-made men were few. And, from another aspect, those who swam in the effulgence of power could scarcely be described as examples of high conduct or culture. They threw their opportunities for these things aside and stamped them under foot as bacchanals in some mad measure might do with wreaths of vine. They spent their money on amusements, luxuries, and friends, — often with vulgarity and insolence. And the exceptions, the many good, dull people and the few good, wise ones, were but sheltering oaks for the offenders to cower under.

Such thoughts as these, less formulated, perhaps, were at times a real torment, and there was no one, it seemed, to whom one might turn for comfort.

Osborne, for instance, now on the important Committee of Ways and Means in the House, discouraged and disapproved them.

"The Masses" were in his view natural enemies. If their share was little it was yet better than they deserved. He recognized — like many of his constituents, mill-men, commercial interests — the prime necessity of propitiating Labor; he regarded a certain outlay each year for the relief of poverty as imperative as shaving before breakfast; but he felt for the Employed unmitigated contempt and disdain. Even one might suspect in him a vague but deep-seated mistrust, alarm, visible at times of unrest, warranted perhaps by the methods the Brotherhoods employ. He could not see their Great Excuse, the senile, inadequate System tottering along, enveloped in a shroud to hide its withered bones.

"As if there was n't row enough," he protested, "with the labor agitators, Socialists, and all the rest who want to solve every problem with a high-explosive, — they'd have work cease altogether, unless, of course, the yoke could be transferred to *our* necks, — draw high pay, — begin at the age of twenty-five, — end at thirty, — rot in a state of innocuous desuetude. A bill pretty near like that on deck at present. They'd keep their lids down pretty tight if the dough was suddenly handed over to them, — you'd see. And here on our few evenings at home my own wife has to come across with a few more."

Two inconsistencies here. In the first place, Osborne seemed really to believe himself a sort of deserving Conqueror, qualified to chide less strenuous men, whereas it was patent to any eye that everything he had, even his book and his legislative seat, the clothes on his back almost, were due to money of which he had not earned a penny. In the second place, the reference in his last remark implied that he cherished solitude as an alleviation for weariness, while as a matter of fact he was always uncomfortable without amusement.

Her fondness, however, had only a tender smile for his affectation. It was his squelching attitude toward these deep misgivings of hers that troubled her.

But the tentative remarks that she cast elsewhere, to Dr. Graves, to Mary Ethridge, to Amelia, betrayed similar attitudes. To them the social fabric was, with variations, like an interesting species of tree, a tree of vital necessity. The fruit of it concerned them. Jerome Graves, for instance, wanted the average crop to be constant, and he wanted the gardeners to be dressed in the Church livery, and he was particular about the kind of baskets used, and the sanitary conditions of the picking. Mary Ethridge busied herself about the pruning of the branches, positive that a conventional shape was the only indispensable to a rich harvest. Amelia, who seemed to represent not only the social but the business world, cool-headed Amelia, felt that it would be time enough to

worry when the fruit should cease coming to the Proper People. As to the condition of the roots and soil, the mere mention seemed to them all a ridiculous and rather insolent superfluity.

Only Elsie Garder, whom Janet now met on the rarest occasions (and the trip to Cambridge was, in the rush of her life, not to be expected), only Elsie seemed with her queer intuition to sympathize. And Elsie was full of an advanced Socialism which, among other intense things, she studied in the evenings, while her husband, who, as a specialist, helped select her reading, pegged in libraries for his meager livelihood or interviewed students.

Elsie criticized things with the ring of confidence. The intolerable inequalities of life, she said, were not those of personality so much as of opportunity. The visitations of Providence one can with a certain resignation endure. The athlete can shake the hand of the man who from superior sinews has outstripped him for the prize. Very different, however, to see the silver cups calmly appropriated by inferior persons to whom the rules of this unsportsmanlike game had given a long head-start. These inequalities, Elsie said, had their being in a political system become a misfit, a structure of ancient, preferential conventions accepted as Law. There was Property, for instance, — a grotesque. The title to Property to-day was as absurd as that of Balboa, centuries ago, crawling his way to the mountain-peak to take possession,

in the face of all his ignorance, in despite of the Tribes, with a gesture of his pygmy arm, of the Pacific! Let the State enforce a compulsory universal education. Let the State control all public utilities and finally all industries. Let the State regulate the wages for labor. Eliminate the right to inherit money. "No incentive to work at all then!" cries the capitalist. But the incentive of the scholar, the scientist, the theologian, the musician, the philosopher, the artist, yes, even of the warrior, — all the great names, was not born of gain. Even the business man bartering ploughshares, or other shares, who alone fades from the page in which during life he so greatly figures, cannot always be proved to be exerting himself for his heirs. Rather, he may be compared to the spider whose web-spinning is instinctive and habitual.

"Start fair, continue with an equal chance (involving, of course, Woman Suffrage)," Elsie said; "adopt a Socialistic System which will become automatic and where in the end Communism will lend Individualism, now suppressed by bare Need, its surest impetus."

So said Elsie, or Elsie's literature, in a torrent of technical terms which sounded possibly fallacious. Osborne at least said they were. And Janet was not prepared to take Elsie, with her intellectual sharpshooting, in preference to Osborne's solid-shot pronouncements.

She was not prepared either to do anything Quixotic in the way of dissipating her fortune in alms, a vagary at which her mother-in-law, perpetually in dudgeon because Mr. Bulyon had not appointed Osborne a trustee of the estate, would not have been surprised. But she became more and more ardently interested in the principles and practice of trying to minimize the effect of life's unequal balance.

The evolution of the Price Case became in itself an argument to find comparative contentment in existing things rather than to follow Jim and Elsie Garder in their restless theories, theories which every practical and successful person with whom she talked condemned as so much dog-in-the-manger yapping. Such a number of people, too, whether or not one approved their methods, whether or not conscientious, were so strenuously engaged in a beneficence which seemed after all simple, easy, fruitful.

Here was Agnes, for instance, now able to leave the baby at a Day Nursery and engage in daily work to support them both. As the nursery did not take children, by some mysterious regulation, on Saturdays, Agnes had not been able to find a better job than rag-sorting at a paper factory. Still, the five dollars she made each week was something to help the fund which Janet hesitated to withdraw. The regular occupation had, besides, had a marvelous effect on the girl's health and spirits. She had sprung back into the characteristic state of youth with its clear eye

and elastic step. Her manner, if not imbued with grace, — if still, in fact, callous, — was propitiatory, at times almost joyous. The sunny room where Janet visited her on Saturday mornings was kept clean and even adorned with knick-knacks, one marveled how, so that it had acquired, especially with the healthy baby in it, an air of home-like permanence.

All this pointed, to Janet's satisfaction, to the responsiveness of the fallen to the helping hand of the Samaritan. Far better, she declared triumphantly, than the results of Dr. Graves's and Mary Ethridge's Organized Social Science which would have given Agnes Price short shrift; better also, she hoped, than that Automatic Socialism of the Garders, where the weak and the failures (as there would be no poor) would also automatically be segregated and disposed of and the spiritual warmth of personal succor eliminated.

She was more and more inclined to think that without the Awful Deluge the Garders anticipated, Benign Effort, even if only the silver lining to a great Nebulous Injustice, might without its destruction gradually permeate the whole Social Structure and turn the cloud to gold. A happy idea whose realization would blend in a sublime harmony the extremes of Conservatism and Radicalism. But it refused to present itself in concrete form. In desperate moments one was obliged to admit it more fantastic than that Automatic Socialism itself. The very be-

ginnings were the steps of Cyclops. Human character would be required to rise to inconceivable heights to guarantee its permanence.

And about the tendency toward sublimity of the human essence the greatest optimist must feel skeptical. So at least it appeared to Janet as her humble field of vision widened. Could one imagine women as a class confining their expenditure for dress to the modicum required for decent appearance? Or willing to eschew display, or excess of comfort, or expensive amusements that the millstone might hang less heavy on the necks of the oppressed? And the men with their centuries' advantage in education, how far were they removed from the primitive emotions of the savage exulting in his enemy's scalp, how many of those whose donations to charity loomed the largest on the lists would satisfy the economic equation by giving down to the margin of his personal need? And how public-spirited were those to whom the so-called Land of Liberty gave seats of power? Parasites like kings without the aroma of royalty, certainly much less trained than kings to govern, they dispensed the public trust funds with a sly wink in the face of the graven image of Democracy.

Curious, too, how frankly such things were admitted! Evidence of the security the beneficiaries of the System felt! Women at lunch parties glibly turned from charities to fashions as a topic of conversation, admitting their outlay on themselves. The men

declared that it was hard sledding for a gentleman in politics, that the existing graft was poison to the touch, that there was, in short, "nothing in it."

Osborne, continuing to snub Janet's reflections of this sort, was constantly enlightening. Among other activities, for instance, in this season, she had occasion, with several friendly members of the Political Equality League (which, on Mrs. Slade's account, she did not join), to visit almshouses, a recent object of that active body's attention. Lamentable revelations there, alas! at the base of the social pyramid where the Privileged Few stand at the apex, — a base so deeply bedded in oblivious sands that it presented a pretty problem of excavation. Carefully must one dig lest the insecure foundation of the monument be exposed! She came home with unspeakable feelings of pity for the derelicts for whom an Institution must play home, — especially the old women, with the long story of misery behind, the present tolerance subject to Rules and privations, and, in the immediate future, death and the official trundling out to make room for the next. Their case was bad enough in these unsavory precincts where Charity hardly cared to penetrate. As for the children surrounded with senility and disease, — there the mind revolted.

Shortly after some of these visits, and a few weeks before their return to the country, she saw in the "Transcript" the news of a large legislative appropriation for a particularly deplorable one of the In-

stitutions in question. The social pace had slackened since the beginning of Lent, and Osborne, with his spasmodic pretense of disdain for dinners and dances, had assumed with expressions of satisfaction a comfortable, figuratively shabby velvet coat, and with slippered feet toward the fire and an extremely expensive cigar, turned over rather ostentatiously a leather "grip" full of papers. Janet sat near and his mother faced him across the hearth, knitting. Amelia was at the theater.

"Oh," Janet exclaimed, jubilantly waving the paper, "I don't suppose you knew that I was interested in the almshouse when you put that through!"

Osborne removed the cigar from his lips long enough to contemplate her with astonishment; but when he gathered her meaning he smiled indulgently, then stuck his cigar into the corner of his mouth.

"You're a great deal too pretty to poke into such questions, Janey. But I did n't put it through, you know."

"Well, I suppose you helped to," she said, leaning eagerly toward him.

He put out his open hand upon the table, an invitation to hers, which she accepted rather insensibly.

"I voted the other way," he said, with an evident amused interest as to how she would take the statement.

"Against it!" she exclaimed, bewildered, and her mother-in-law, looking up, repeated the words in a

somewhat querulous tone. It was a peculiarity of Mrs. Slade's that, in spite of her adoration for Osborne and jealousy of others' behavior toward him, she could yet treat him rather fretfully when he was under her own roof.

"Oh, it was one of those bargains one has to make," Osborne said coolly, stretching out his legs to a new comfortable posture. "Said I'd try to help defeat it if the bunch would stand by on the Railroad Rate Case. It only squeaked in."

Janet withdrew her hand.

"I'm surprised that you can take it like that," she said.

Osborne got up and took the tongs and poked the fire, puffing out pungent cloudlets. When he turned around he said, "Dearest girl and revered parent, the intricacies of politics seem to be as little apprehended by you as the writing on the bricks of Babylon. How do you suppose one gets things done? Just by asking? Or by looking pretty? Which really might cut some ice in your case, Janey, I'll admit."

"You're flippant, Osborne," Mrs. Slade said, removing her shell-rimmed spectacles.

"I'm not, mamma. But to ease your minds let me tell you that the fifty thousand dollar appropriation for improvements to the almshouse will melt away like snow on a southerly bank. The neighbors out that way have been complaining of its looks. Hurts real estate. So there's going to be a pillared front, a

lot of shrubbery, an ornamental fence, and if there's some over a new ward may get in, but I don't think so."

"No sitting-room for the poor things? Or separate quarters for the mothers with children?"

Osborne shook his head. "Not on the accepted plans."

"It's an outrage!" Janet exclaimed.

"So you see," said Osborne, "it was n't worth a vote, after all."

CHAPTER VII

When the day for the Slades' home flight actually came, a day in April that was late compared to the general spring migration and actuated by unmanageable plumbers, Janet's Cases and Interests were in a quiescent state where she felt justified in leaving them with a prospect of more desultory attention from out of town. Even her vitality was beginning to evince symptoms of accentuated nervous tension. If the removal had been much longer postponed she could even have become a Case herself.

Not a surprising result, certainly, of working under constant pressure and the further strain of exerting tact throughout the course of daily life. For it had soon become evident that the mere fact of residing *en famille* with Mrs. Slade and Amelia was to be a task in itself. Her husband's mother belonged to the type of woman whose ideas consist of a collection of prints after accepted masterpieces. It was inconceivable to her that ideals other than these might exist for virtuous people or legitimately express themselves in new representations. Originality was abhorrent. The pictures were so familiar to her, so clear in mind, that she had fallen, at an age when one is considered deserving of indulgence, into complaints of the discrepancies between them and the individuals

surrounding her. That Janet was lax as a housewife transpired, neither understood her servants nor "kept them up to the mark"; — a dart aimed especially at the inimitable Norah, who relaxed in the Slade kitchen and unsettled the company with remarks about the smallness of the staff and the unequaled amount of work expected of each. But Norah, as she reminded them, was accustomed to a "First Place," disparaging thereby darkly the households of the merely "Well-to-do." Comments, these, which sifted to Mrs. Slade's ears via a chambermaid demanding higher wages, so that the demoralization of modern days and the irresponsibility of young wives who would do anything to save themselves trouble, were the obvious conclusions. Augustus himself was a bone of contention. He was not brought up as were children of a former generation. He was pampered (when attempts at blandishment were futile), but he was abused (when subjected to discipline), and his health, in this way or in that, was neglected. And though the wisdom of grandmothers, whose own mistakes in their children are patent to their eyes, cannot be questioned, yet the warfare, dignified but bitter, which revolved around the nursery, had become to Janet almost intolerable.

As for Amelia, she was not one who became warmer with close acquaintance. On the contrary, like a block of ice, whatever slight softness there was existed on the surface. Descriptively she was the sum

of excellences, but the aloofness of her increased as one approached. One suspected a rather intense personality subjected to disappointments and restrictions. Vaguely the feeling began to grow upon Janet that the triple presence of herself with the nurse and baby was to Amelia distinctly onerous. And all efforts to counter this, to be interested, to be helpful, collided with a cold slant of patronage. There were heights from which her sister-in-law seemed to look down. Family in the first place towered above, then the mystic elevation of Church connections, then a certain plane of Intellectuality which Janet had at first not apprehended. Amelia hobnobbed with Prestige. She belonged to Lunch Clubs with people of Mind and Taste. If it might be suspected that the Mind consisted in a certain glibness in discussing Book Club volumes and the Taste the more primitive one of Lucullus, it did not lessen the feeling that Amelia's sphere was hopeless to attain.

Only in Osborne did their interests merge, and Osborne seemed to have so quickened his sister's breast that even there, occasionally, the friction of differing attitudes was aroused. Yes, Amelia was a distinct reason for welcoming one's return to the country.

It was a heavenly season to leave the narrow apartments and bricks for spaciousness and peace. Osborne having preferred, from his devotion to detail, to attend to the moving (not a difficult proposition,

anyway, with the best service), the change of outlook was all the more striking for her that it had seemed so instantly accomplished.

On the morning after their return, having breakfasted at leisure, she surveyed from her balcony the view of mist-hung valley and dreamy hills beyond the pink-budded tree-tops, — and then descended joyously into the sunny interior where the household machine was already running with its accustomed smoothness.

Alone and feeling almost lost in the bigness of it, the grandeur that seemed to dawn on her anew, she went from room to room half singing, discovering again, as it were, the treasures which she had only learned since her marriage truly to appreciate.

Extraordinary, the emotion, the infinite harmonic satisfaction that an exquisite work of art can stimulate. There was an early Tuscan altar-piece on wood, cracked, chipped, and blackened, a willowy angel form, haloed in faded gold, surrounded with voluminous drapery, holding in stiff, long fingers a preposterous daisy, and in the background somewhere high-tapering, half-obliterated wings, while at her feet crouched the mystic figure of the winged bull. A graceful antique expression of purity, of reverence, if flat and crude, and it held one with an indefinable charm — in an unappeased suspense. And there was a Monet in the parlor, placid water with shining lily-pads, and shadows and reflections that invited one to

explore. And then a Sorolla, a gaudy dancer, a crude, passionate Tarantella, calls to one, screaming with loud, thick-pigmented rhythm, unfinished, an almost studied incompleteness.

Such things as these Osborne had been able to mingle with a careful *abandon*. There were also carved pieces of jade that one might study with a microscope; ornamental ware, vases, goblets of every design, every period, from Ming porcelains to Capo-del-Monte. Everything smiled in the sunlight, gave up its deepest, richest tints. Even the historic weapons that adorned the spaces in the tapestried hall, themselves a lifetime's study, looked friendly and serene.

If all these objects gathered from the whole world, the loot of centuries, the fruit of genius, did not seem perhaps really to belong to her from the mere fact that Osborne's discrimination and her father's money had by the strange permission of the law accumulated them, — if one felt in them an ineffable something that was aloof, impersonal, appealing, and yet beyond possession, — if one was aware that only an interval of years and they would be wafted hence, separated, transferred to other Collections or to become the Penates of other families, — yet there was a glamour about them that ennobled their surroundings and gave home the illusion of completeness.

While she hovered, smelling here and there of the flowers which, both potted and cut, had been lavishly

dispensed through the various rooms and banked in the great hall-windows by the assiduous gardener, there was a sudden "Cluck! Cluck! Cluck!" and then a peal of laughter which did not need to be repeated. She opened one of the windows and stepped out to find Augustus on the veranda, sheltered, basking in the moist spring sunlight and trying to entice an eager but distrustful gray squirrel.

The poor creature showed well enough by his baggy flanks the winter's severity, but, spread like a bat head-downwards on the trunk of the near oak, he rippled his half-moulted plume in expressive qualms and eyed the small red-cheeked gnome in white, tassel-capped suit, who stooped and, with a delicious attempt at wariness, approached with extended sugar.

The appearance of Janet, however, put the last straw on the back of his apprehension, and he sprang behind the tree whence his flight was audible in its scratchy scramble.

Augustus turned a face of wrath upon his mother and stamped his foot.

"Dere, naughty girl. Fightened squirly 'way!" he screamed, almost unintelligible with rage, whereupon from the house instantly emerged Norah.

"Ain't you ashamed to speak to mother like that, Augustus!" she exclaimed, and laid on the child none too light a hand. "You shan't feed the squirrels any more now. You come with Nonie."

"Suppose I take him for a little walk, Nonie? I

want to," Janet said. Although Norah had transferred her allegiance to Augustus in these days, Janet still involuntarily relapsed into the meekness of her own youthful attitude.

Norah raised her black eyebrows. She was nearing fifty, and had led a life of sleepless nights, yet not a hair was gray. A formidable woman.

"Of course, if you say, — Mrs. Slade," — She rolled the formal title on her tongue and implied the direst consequences. Her independence had increased with years. The bellicose effect of the visit to Marlborough Street, too, had perhaps not subsided.

"Well," said Janet, surprised at her own temerity, "I think I will take him down to the pond. Where the brook runs in there are pools, — and sometimes in the spring there are in the pools, — what do you think, Augustus? Pollywogs!"

"Bollybogs!" cried Augustus, all smiles, and placing his hand in his mother's with resolution. "Take me to see the bollybogs and leave naughty Nonie!"

The nurse turned on her heel with an expression that plainly said, "There, you see!". And Janet, feeling rather guilty, and with an admittedly weak "You must n't call people 'naughty,' Augustus," grasped the little hand more firmly and led her son, lending occasional assistance, down the wood-path that skirted Osborne's formal terraces, through the limp leaves of the preceding autumn where peeking heads shot forth on every side.

It was full of the joy of life, this day, and of eternal youth. One felt allied to all lovely, vital things, the song of the world, the hope, the poetry of light and shadow, conscious of immediate nature's turgescence, awake with unfamiliar faculties to all its hidden forces. And somehow with Augustus at her side, with the unrevealed possibilities of his life beginning to unroll like a bud, with his strange, gay perception of everything around, a primitive responsiveness that age seems to lose and marvels at as an early mystery of itself, — feeling this with the persistent clutch of his little hand, the beauty of the day was still further beautified. It seemed to become a setting for the most idyllic of all idylls, that of mother and child.

When they had searched for pollywogs without much success, for the water was still icy and Augustus so eager that his white suit became instantly spoiled, they turned to the bulb-garden near by where in a stone-walled enclosure several men were at work with wheelbarrows, rakes, and trowels. There were carpets of crocuses already on the wane and borders of snowdrops and tulips and jonquils and hyacinths — a profusion which Osborne loved.

The head gardener was directing the work, which consisted in thinning the beds, trimming the borders, and putting the paths in show condition. Osborne, indeed, had already invited people for the week-end with the ostensible purpose of displaying the bulbs.

As they entered from the lower end it happened that she met her husband coming from the terraces. He was dressed according to his custom in the country, in riding-clothes suggestive of the Squire, with soft hat and heavy cane, a form of apparel that permitted his fancy to disport itself in gay ties and waistcoats.

With him to-day was a Mr. McGinnis, an Irishman with round white face, thin lips, square nose, and quick blue eyes, a fellow-legislator whom Osborne had found it necessary to invite, on business, for their very first night.

"Here you are!" Osborne cried. "We've been hunting you everywhere."

At sight of Augustus he doubled himself up in imitation of a bear, rather lumbering it must be confessed, and went at him with growls which convulsed the child with laughter.

Mr. McGinnis admired the garden with the suggestion of a brogue, not only politely, but with intelligent comments and an acquisitive glance that seemed to gather the salient points to itself, with the projective idea, perhaps, of future use, should the political career prove fruitful. Janet tried earnestly to explain methods of bulb-culture, desirous to please her husband's guest, but she was aware of her own faulty propensity to jump to conclusions, to take for granted the finished beauty of these flower-beds without an active interest in the process of production.

So lamentable was her attempt, in fact, that Osborne came hotly to the rescue.

"No, I put those out in the autumn, not in the spring, McGinnis. Sorry to correct you, dear. Just before the frost. Some varieties — those in that nook, for instance — we allow to remain bedded right along — divide as they please. The weaklings apt to get strangled out. The others have to be taken up when the pod develops and stored in the root-cellar. I don't do much with them after two seasons, though. Bring 'em over from Holland each year."

He flourished his cane as he spoke and continued enthusiastically, pointing out this particularly perfect bloom and that. He mentioned medals won last year. He expatiated upon the plants very much as a kennel expert might over the "points" of the animals at a dog show. And McGinnis, while his host explained, would narrow his pale eyes and nod his head and contract his lips as if to emit a whistle. Finally he enunciated the thought that all this floral beauty provoked in him.

"It must cost something, — eh, Slade?" he exclaimed in canny admiration.

"It does — a bit," Osborne replied, checked rather than encouraged by the comment.

In New England one objects to the bald reference to Mammon with as much fastidiousness as to the use of the word "God." Perhaps Osborne was reminded that most of his tastes were expensive.

But he passed the subject easily with a flourish and a generality.

"Everything costs, you know, nowadays," he smiled.

"You're not letting me lose my train with all these sylvan seductions, are you, now, Slade?" asked the guest, — and the loophole by this time was welcome.

"If you're sure you can't wait and take the 12.09 with me, I suppose we'd better be strolling," Osborne said agreeably. "The car will be waiting for you and the man has your grip, so we can take it easy."

McGinnis raised his hand with a most courtly gesture.

"I'll find the way to the house myself — I will," he insisted. " 'T would be an offense that I'd not carry on my conscience to separate a parent from his lady and child. It's a handsome family group that will linger with me, Mrs. Slade."

After a few more protests and a reference to helping himself at the sideboard, which he seemed to regard as a tremendous witticism, he took his departure.

Augustus, become restless and intent upon digging a destructive toe into the flower-beds, was now led upwards slowly, as his legs were fat and short, around the rustic steps of stone in whose curves fountains, presided over by Pompeiian statuettes, gently plashed, and over whose sunny, trickling walls vines waved their sprouting tendrils and bright lizards (imported to complete the picture) strayed. As they

reached the top to find a formal terrace with rare shrubs trimmed into fantastic shapes, interspersed by marble divinities, and beyond it all a glimpse of the small lake, silver in the valley, Osborne, who had lingered to repeat some directions, came up behind, joyously whistling one of the new ragtime ditties.

He put his arm through his wife's and together they moved along the wide gravelled path that still ascended, with low steps at the rise of each terrace. The sun bathed them with an almost fluid warmth that seemed to penetrate the body. At each step the view widened and they turned often to drink it in. A rustic, simple view enough, with the other comfortable country-houses peeping from distant groves, a view that depended upon Nature's moods for feature and to-day was all amenity and softness.

Down in the near distance lay the checkered fields, and low, gray-gabled buildings of their own farm, and the ribbon-like track where Osborne's lately acquired racing stud was exercised, and on the hither side a blossoming orchard.

As they paused Osborne took from his pocket a small notebook, hanging his stick on his arm by its crook.

"There, I forgot to tell Perkins about that new sheep-wash," he murmured. "The animals are tormented. See how the yew-hedge shows up," he went on, pointing over Janet's shoulder. "Won't take it long to amount to something. An improvement over

the old rough walls, don't you think? They're only suitable for pasture-division and I'm not sure that I don't prefer one of these new patent fencings even there."

In recent months he had largely dropped the attitude of her deputy.

They moved again lazily, and, ahead, with the pulpy crimson wreck of a tulip still clutched in his round fist, tripped Augustus. Janet's eyes doted on him while her husband talked. It seemed to her that the brimming day expressed their life just then.

"Is n't he enchanting!" she exclaimed irrelevantly as the child warded off with mimic valor the sudden aggression of a bee.

"Enchanting? Who, Gussie?" Osborne returned. He pressed his wife's arm tighter. "I should think he was. I wish, with all this great place, we had a dozen like him!"

Strange, she thought, that that casual exclamation should be the first expression of either of them of a vital something, a fear, a wish that had hovered for the last year in her heart. But somehow between them vital topics never did arise. There was always something immediate to be discussed. Osborne was besides essentially an immediate person, not prone to dwell on background things. With him many topics were background things. She had perceived long ago that it distressed him to bring them forward. Nor, innately reserved, had she really ever felt any tempta-

tion to express to him her most intimate thoughts. For the first time it struck her as odd that this should be so.

"Osborne," she blurted out with a sudden impulse — "Perhaps there's a chance — the dimmest."

"You don't mean —?" he cried jubilantly, now putting his arm tight around her. "That would be great news!"

He glanced at her for a moment curiously with the bewilderment of mere man. Then a quick train of ideas evidently kindled through his mind.

"Now, if it's so, you're going to take care of yourself," he declared. "You're not going to get tired —" And then, "Let's see, — November, — December, — By Jove, if I get my seat in the Senate it will interfere with our going to town!"

"I don't intend to go to town next year," she exclaimed positively, and with for the first time a slight show of opposition.

But he did not perceive it. His mind still flashed ahead.

"Well, of course, even if it were to be earlier you probably would n't want to go in. Impossibly crowded at mamma's. But I can spend the nights there when there's much of a rush —"

The idea seemed satisfying yet he hummed in a thoughtful undertone.

"I hope it won't tire you having this crowd over Sunday," he then tossed —

"Who, besides the Vastors and Bensons?"

"Oh, no one to stay. But Alice Vastor is great on these new dances. She's just as crazy as Sam is the opposite. She has to be amused. In fact, they're all Trotters. So I thought we'd have a few of the neighbors in Saturday night."

"You know that my health is never a question —" Janet said.

She caught sight again, as they paused before the house, of the flowering apple trees near the farm and the association carried her mind to the scene last year in the matron's room of the Heath Home and thence onward.

"And Mary Ethridge!" she exclaimed. "I'd wholly forgotten that she asked to come out for Sunday, too!"

"Good Heavens!" said Osborne, slapping his thigh. "Well, I suppose it can't be helped."

CHAPTER VIII

It was certainly important to both Osborne and Janet that this first house-party of theirs which deserved the name should be a success. Casual visitors had, of course, heretofore come and gone. The Vastors were in a very different category. They were people of immense wealth, of a social importance to which no doors were closed, and of a name which, if indigenous (as far as one knew) to New York, yet had become an international byword. More than that, Sam Vastor had refused to plunge downwards with the social rapids or even to rest on his oars in some backwater after the standardized fashion of multi-millionaires' sons. He had with praiseworthy ambition worked his way upward in a chosen specialty, become one of the foremost experts in the allied sciences of forestry and horticulture, and was perpetually retained at Washington, whatever the ebb and flow of Administrations, as the Grand Panjandrum of National Parks. He as well as Hartwell Benson had been a classmate and clubmate of Osborne's at Harvard. Like Osborne he had an advantage of some years over his wife. She was an admiral's daughter described as a "peach," who had refused in leaving naval circles to abandon the characteristic naval *joie de vivre.*

The Bensons, too, were from "foreign" parts, also unknown to Janet, but differing from the other couple in type, she understood from Osborne. Benson was described as a successful landscape painter, inclined perhaps to formal, finished scenes, to studied settings, especially to architectural *motifs*, and for whom the wild expressions of Nature had no charm. They were quiet people, she gathered, he and his wife (to whom belonged the pedestal of an old Philadelphia family), yet they moved, it would seem by preference, with the Notable and Notorious of Society.

It was from the start of a projected trip to Europe *en partie carrée* that Osborne had thus snatched them. A "Reunion" he called it, implying to his wife high times before her day, a reunion very opportune to the condition of the bulb-garden, where Benson of course might be inspired to dabble. A party unquestionably to concern a young hostess, even without the embarrassing complication of Mary Ethridge.

Things did go better, though, than one might have hoped. The only awkwardness was at the start. To tell the truth Mary had arrived in the limousine with the others from the local train, but astonishingly throned on the front seat with the chauffeur while the vivacious quartette filled the inside, — and it could not be concealed that Mary, with a humility which was not her official characteristic, had permitted herself to be mistaken ("in her quaint Boston clothes," so Alice Vastor put it) for a governess. Her good

humor as a victim, however, instantly won all hearts, the impulsive Alice overwhelmed her with attention, Vastor found material from the mistake for complimentary puns that lasted over Sunday, the Bensons (if more restrained) exerted themselves to make atonement, and in fact the deplorable incident in the end proved a most effective ice-breaker. An afternoon walk through the woods which became hung with a characteristic springtime haze, further "loosened things up." The reluctant awe of Mary for these Illustrious Personages became mitigated by their condescension which was half-amused and partly pleased by her ultra-respectable presence.

Janet, however, began to find new ground for perplexity. The longer her guests stayed the more evident it became that among those who are thoroughly In It a freemasonry exists which is no respecter of private rights. The old-fashioned rule of hospitality which aims at making the intruders thoroughly at home was amended in the most liberal terms. Servants were called, bells rung, complicated beverages demanded with the nonchalance of club-life. Astounding! and yet transacted with a coolness that disarmed one. Osborne seemed to see nothing singular, but Janet was affected with constraint. It was as if somehow she had suddenly been pushed out of doors and was looking in at the windows of her own home.

The evening held further surprises. The tinge of

conventionality, however slight, inextricable from entertainments in town, subjected to the limelight, was absent here. The country-side (to use the word discreetly) assembled with its usual intention of entertaining itself "with the lid off." But the very closeness of the two dozen couples and the domesticity of their neighborly relations, which tended sometimes to suffuse the atmosphere with a family-party inertia, was to-night charged with the energy of the strangers' presence.

To the smartest these latter were already known and even in spots related. Dorothy Eliot was Vastor's first cousin and Mrs. Benson a sister-in-law of Fred Beekman's. Virginia Higbee, too, who played very picturesquely the rôle of bachelor-maid in a historic old cottage near the village, flew into Alice Vastor's arms as the paladin Roland is said to have done on encountering his blood-brother, and engaged her in the ecstatic whispering of long-standing intimacy. It was plain from the first that no element of rigidity menaced the evening!

Yet, there was Mary Ethridge, who, having exchanged with her neighbors at dinner ideas that somehow could not get beyond the newspaper headlines, had seated herself baffled, and rather tiresomely, being a house-guest, next to Janet on a small sofa.

"Did you ever!" she protested in Janet's ear, her fair cheeks hot, condemning not only the cigarettes of the ladies but the studied outrageousness of white

and black combinations in Mrs. Vastor's gown, extremely scant and *décolleté;* the shimmering, snake-like effect of Mrs. Benson's; the simple black of the seductive Mrs. Lansing's, which managed by its very bareness to be the most daring of them all.

But Janet found herself unprovided with an opinion. Certain as it was that these people violated the old accepted notion of propriety, still taught to girls (it might be presumed), it was also certain that they represented a standard with more vitality, something luring, irresistible. They glanced, they moved, they smiled with the *abandon* of those who have taken Pleasure for a bridegroom, who have done so with no youthful *naïveté*, no primitive impulse, but with the nice discrimination of appreciative art. They were past-masters. They were adepts. They were the Paderewskis of enjoyment.

Her own dress was white, becoming, and the work of a first-class dressmaker, yet, in its modest compromise between decency and the fashion, made her feel without distinction, lost. Though in her inmost soul she was content to go halfway with Mary's breathless disapproval, yet a certain pride, a certain jealousy, piqued her to know more of the talisman which gave these women domination.

And when Mary further hissed, "What creatures!" with that propensity for generalities that reminded one of her old attitude toward Agnes Price, it was an added instigation to rebel, to escape from hide-bound

Conventionalists to these gilded ranks of Opportunism.

She blessed Virginia Higbee, who approached and seemed prepared to take over Mary. A remarkable girl, Virginia. She was one of those people who succeed without an effort of their own, by the help perhaps of some invisible force, as that of Gravity ultimately brings the winding streamlet to the sea. Extremely indolent, she yet had innumerable friends. An ego which pivoted upon itself, yet she occasionally performed good-natured altruistic deeds which brought her a whole harvest of good-will. Tremendously pretty, with a shell-like pinkness and hair which was really gold, and a loose, rather haremesque figure, she was always an adornment and always in possession of a train of languishing admirers. Nobody had more invitations. Nobody accepted more. Rather devout and virtuous by instinct, her reputation helped the giddy throng with whom she associated, whose crimes of gambling, Sabbath-breaking, and the like, she did not share but still condoned.

To Mary Ethridge she was the concrete solution of the problem of reconciling High Society and Virtue, two fetishes, the link to bridge the gap. They began at once to discuss the programme of the coming Northfield Conference which they both expected to attend.

"If the men do not come to me soon," Alice Vastor was declaring as Janet approached, "I shall go to the men!"

The direct cause of this rash announcement was the spirited bursting upon the air, although remote, of the newest rag from the direction of the music-room. She could not restrain herself from a *pas seul* before the hearth. She waved her cigarette, she was supple, graceful, gleaming, and absolutely devoid of self-consciousness — or perhaps so conscious of self that the presence of others was obliterated. She mimicked to perfection a low music-hall ballad (or up to that year it would have been considered low), with all the flaunting of hips and torsal gyrations and suggestive gestures complete. Her eyes flashed and her lips were parted. She finished with a sort of clog-dance of her delicately slippered feet.

"Come!" she cried, dashing the cigarette into the fire. "I'm mad to dance. I can't wait!"

As she started for the door, happily, the gentlemen, also impelled by the musician's arrival, met her *en masse.*

"Ah, my Alice," said Vastor, with whom she chanced to collide, "I thought those strains would bring you to trip the light fantastic. Come!"

He offered her his arm mockingly, his cigar in his lips, for this being Liberty Hall, so Osborne said, it had not been required to remain in the smoking-room.

"Not you, old horticulturist!" said his wife, impatiently pushing him aside, and as the others all necessarily bowed to her hand on heart, she cried,

"It's irresistible, that tune! It's too good. I must have Herman Duer!"

The chosen man, handsome, laughing, and cheered by the others, sprang to her side, and together, picturesquely, the pair danced across the threshold out along the tapestried hall where the candle-light gleamed flickeringly upon her hair and skin and jewels and his ardent face while they dipped and glided to the voluptuous rhythm. They disappeared in the distance.

Vastor offered his arm to Mrs. Beekman and proceeded with the deliberation of a heavy man and the rest followed in pairs and groups.

When the music-room was reached the couple was still fiercely dancing, the colored musician, whom Osborne believed himself to have "discovered," having augmented his dash at their arrival, and until the piece came to an end and Alice threw herself on to a couch, all remained spectators.

The "new dances," which had nearly ousted the old waltz in the great Metropolis, had hovered on the brink of acceptance all winter in this vicinity, but they were still new enough to provoke excited comment. Complications other than moral, upon which ground they were chiefly attacked and defended, had arisen by their introduction. Persons who formerly excelled in the art of Terpsichore now found themselves at a disadvantage. Classes were being formed to learn the essentials, but those who had

never seen Maurice nor his followers felt themselves uneducated and as little prepared to exhibit themselves in a ballroom as to debate Hedonism with Professor Royce. When the perspiring darky next belabored his instrument there were hesitations and apologies.

"As for me," declared Gordon Eliot the contentious, — who was the salt of the earth and had red hair and spectacles and always threw out his chest like a solemn turkey-cock, best of neighbors but most opinionated of men, — "I consider it improper t' do these hanged things with another than one's wife."

"A pleasant prospect if they stay in long!" Dorothy slapped back.

"Come along!" He caught hold of her and plunged out into the room in spite of her protests, committing intentional horrors for the benefit of all.

It was such an attitude as his in fact that really gave the dances half their wicked *cachet*.

There were some, however, who subtly understood their possibilities.

Janet found Mrs. Lansing standing between herself and Osborne.

"Are n't you going to ask me to dance?" she heard her suggest softly.

"I'm no good at it," he returned, looking down at her in a way that seemed astoundingly shy, almost sheepish.

"Let me teach you."

He appeared to hesitate.

"Well," he said at last, and held out his arms. She seemed at once engulfed in them.

"You ought to hold me closer," one heard.

No wonder the old ladies criticized, Janet thought amusedly. Manners must appear topsy-turvy. She herself scarcely felt modern enough to accept without a qualm the new freedom between men and women. It must be confessed that she was piqued, though, the slightest bit, by Miriam Lansing's possessive manner toward Osborne. When she found offering himself as a partner the very Herman Duer whom Alice Vastor had selected from all the rest, the dashing bachelor from no one knew exactly what origin, tremendously successful, however, at thirty, she hesitated no more.

She felt excited and adventurous as his arm pressed her and said with unwonted ardor, "I promise to learn anything if you'll teach me how!"

"*Carte blanche?*" he challenged, regarding her with an evidently surprised interest. "Good! I ought to accomplish something then. But you must n't forget it's a bargain."

"I won't forget," she laughed, and threw herself into the swing, regardless of a pale remark from Mary Ethridge somewhere to the effect of, "Oh, Janet, how can you!"

There was emancipation in the delirium of motion, an emancipation from problems, from ideas, from

duty, that none other paralleled. For this evening she was going to let herself go, as the other women did, see what it was, this enchantment that captivated every one. The saner hours of daylight were distant. If then one might condemn this new device of pleasure, it should be indulged at least to-night. She would vie with these others, she would vie with Mrs. Lansing. The man who clasped her so close she knew was fair game. Had she the power of conquest?

It was a spirit that was rewarded with partners. The advertisement of less rigid principles was apparently a move toward popularity. As the evening wore on and the fun became more furious, they presented themselves with an eagerness that was new — but Herman Duer returned many times.

"You were a success this evening," Osborne said emphatically when they retired very late.

She appeared to him, it seemed, in a new, more brilliant light. His career would not suffer from her success!

But before the last guest had gone a revulsion of feeling had come. What was she, a married woman, doing with that triumph of just now? What were all these people doing but playing with disastrous fire?

She stood and brushed her hair by the open window with the mild air drifting in and contemplated the white night where the moon was battling with the dawn. The divine, pure passion nature expressed contrasted with that artificial human fever . . . Had

that exultation, now, been perhaps what Osborne called "temperament"? The only satisfaction it had left with her was the pleasure of pleasing him. Yet it was incongruous that he should be pleased.

And as she looked forth it seemed just then, strangely, after all the years, that the specter of Donald Craig confronted her.

CHAPTER IX

When the morning came Janet felt that she had taken the whole business too seriously. Mary Ethridge, reproachfully silent at breakfast (where neither Mrs. Vastor nor Mrs. Benson appeared) and sermonic on the subject of the new dances afterward before her departure for church, seemed grotesque. Janet convinced herself that half the evil in departures from old-fashioned restrictions comes from just such condemnation. It is the very cause often for the sale of many a stupid book, the success of many a silly play, and for all the ridiculous fashions. The healthy human instinct to resist interference, one of history's inspirations, urges the original-minded to advocate censured things.

And then these people who had seemed last night so wanton, so reckless, so remote from the domestic idea, appeared comfortably harmless by day.

Sam Vastor, for instance, for all that personal grossness, the big, square head with sparse, black locks and crooked teeth under a bristling mustache, his corpulent body balanced forward on spindly legs like a giant robin's, proved such a delight as a companion in the morning ramble over the estate. The revelation of his true passion, neither for liquor nor for cigars nor for cards, as one might have supposed

last night (his Alice, it appeared, being more than sufficient in the way of women), was astonishing. The man who looked the grub of human kind proved the butterfly in the realm of Nature. He was primed with knowledge and enthusiasm about birds and plants. And he was the true scientist, eager to share with others.

He filled Janet with warmth by insisting on Augustus's coming along. He addressed himself especially to the child, tenderly imparting wonderful tales. There appeared to be fairies on every leaf, behind every stone. And his manner also flattered Janet, seeming to say that he was aware of what a pretty woman she was, what an intelligent woman, and that he was exerting himself particularly for her.

At the bulb-garden which Osborne and Benson had already reached, the painter established with tools, Vastor expressed himself of her opinion in the matter of massed effects.

"But I disclaim any artistic knowledge," he said, looking down from the steps. "The experts declare that bulbs are different and I suppose they know. Great beds of blossoms always affect me like pans of candy in confectioners' windows. . . . But your background here is perfect. The composition from a technical point of view I'm sure Benson will pronounce ideal. For myself, I like my floral subjects balanced, the way Nature does it."

Augustus, hanging on his hand, began to pull him

toward the next flight downward. Augustus was insistent and beginning to be spoiled. He was growing in appearance lately very like his father. Of that Janet was glad and her mother-in-law delighted, but a change less acceptable was his antipathy to affection. He wanted his way, he wanted attention, but he resisted fondling. Remembering the tender, demonstrative quality of her own filial relations Janet was grieved to see this chilly characteristic creeping out.

Vastor now took the little boy on his shoulder to give him a ride. He seemed genuinely fond of children. When Janet protested at his trouble he said rather pathetically, "I've never had any kids myself, you know. In our family there has never been time for them." A hard-worked explanation!

When they had descended into the garden and the conversation divulged the fact that the gentlemen's wives never arose on Sunday morning, when she found in Benson also an interesting person whose rather laconic, crusty manner seemed suspiciously the result of being forever compelled to mix in an uncongenial society, one meditated on the responsibilities of women. The notion that women are weak and dependent, oppressed, with a Cause against men who have brought their disabilities about, an opinion which, as a Party Creed, Janet had almost adopted, was shaken for her. There seemed to be something innate in women which led things to extremes,

potent and terrible rather than feeble. The most foolish man was apt to have something redeeming, something real. Such women as Alice Vastor, Genevieve Benson, Margaret Ogden, yes, such women as Mary Ethridge, as bigoted as they were light, made one feel that before regarding feminine emancipation as the Social Cure, there was need to ponder deeply.

Yet is mere grace in its pure essence perhaps the only contribution that ought to be demanded of women as citizens? That thought, too, presented itself when later, after noon, the two guests came smiling down, with complexions like rose-leaves, fingernails like pink porcelain, bright eyes and shining hair. If the world required these women to work, as the Garders' Socialism would have it, would n't the world lose something? Would a real thing be lost or just an artifice?

It was perplexing, all this, like the other new aspects life offered. Still more so when with some men who had come in to lunch auction-tables were later made up. To Janet the Sunday question was nothing. What puzzled her was that when the shadows lengthened and much money had been passed across the table (the food for starving babies, the old wife's ease, the chance for talented youth), Alice Vastor leaned toward her and asked in low tones, "Could it be managed, Mrs. Slade?" Janet wondered what. "I don't know where your church is — Genevieve and I would like to go to Vespers."

Extraordinary, furthermore, the effect of this upon Mary Ethridge, who having spent the afternoon alone with a book and the pursed lips of horrified righteousness, declared after their departure, "It shows how every one has good in them after all. I'm sorry I misjudged them."

To Janet of all things their church-going was the most cynical.

Later the virulence of the Cynicism in social life became more than ever plain. Those who take things contentedly as they are, as if their advantages over the rest were God's intention, are cynics like the brazen breakers of commandments. A cynicism of action worse than a cynicism of thought. An unconscious cynicism, often of the most joyous and devout, a subtle cynicism. Kindness, self-sacrifice might abound, rare natures stud the world with jewels. They could not balance the mass of social slag to which, for all the pious protestations, the Heavenly Kingdom is a myth and the real goal a region bounded by a visible horizon. To their shrewdness it was evident that Providence is hardly impartial in the distribution of Its gifts, that the man in the saddle must keep his head to keep his seat, that the powerful army of the Under Dog must be lured from rebellion by a bait of favor.

These observations would scarcely have found shape had she not been led in the course of things to see more of the Garders in Cambridge — the Garders

who formulated everything. In brief, the fact that her life and Osborne's became especially gay this spring, closely initiated into the circle of people supposedly at the apex of desirability, that she found herself compromised between temptations and principles (worries unknown to Osborne), brought her face to face with questions which she refused to ignore. It seemed imperative to thrash things out, to talk things over, and it could not be done with persons of any brand who take the world for granted.

But it was strange how, in seeking the Garders, she made pretexts. She did not confide in them as she used to with Elsie. She proposed to them specific instances concealed as generalities to extract their opinions without self-betrayal. She was rather ashamed.

Jim Garder, however, was not one to be made a fool of. Tall and lanky, with big ears and a wide, humorous mouth, as carelessly dressed as his wife, he would slouch into the room in big, worn slippers, enormous bone spectacles on the end of his nose, and throw witticisms at her that disregarded the fact that she was lovely, smart, and fast becoming the "rage," and thereby confuse and pique her. That he did not disdain her amateurish inquiries into his academic specialty gave her, it is true, a pleasant feeling of superiority over the lighter people whose "set" she had now willy-nilly joined.

But there came a day when she entered the Cam-

bridge house amid its enshrining shrubbery in a state of real tribulation. She was tired after multitudinous activities, each necessary in the complicated tangle of her life, yet none somehow in itself satisfying. And it was a day marked by an astounding accidental revelation.

At the end of the morning, before a lunch-party, she had visited the fashionable Hair-Dressing and Manicure Rooms of Madame Rainault. Although an important client, yet, without an appointment, it was necessary to content herself with one of the newer girls, to whom she was unknown. She was divested of furs and hat and dived into one of the little booths separated by curtains of unbleached cotton that slid on rings. She became passive to the girl's manipulations, with closed eyes, thankful to escape the veterans' chatter. She was sinking into a delicious state of dreaminess when words, pronounced seemingly in her ear, pricked her sharply to attention.

"Yes, Mrs. Dean, it's down in so much print in the number of 'Town Tattle' that came to-day, — right there on the table, — Mr. Osborne Slade's name and Mrs. Lansing's coupled together. It's just fierce how they let them publish such things, is n't it? Am I brushing too hard?"

Janet closed her eyes again while her own attendant silently lathered her head.

"I did n't know 'Town Tattle' had it," a musical, suave voice in the next compartment responded.

"I don't think I want any of the ointment to-day. You say there is a bald spot? May I have the mirror? I shall have to begin parting nearer the middle."

"Do you think the talk is true, Mrs. Dean?" came the *patronne's* wheedling tones. An essential part of business, this harvesting of gossip . . .

"Well, I'm surprised it should have got so far," the other returned indifferently, "but since so much is known I guess there's no harm in saying that she is supposed to have him completely subjugated. They were at the Drapers' night before last. He had eyes only for her. He glared at her gloomily when she danced with any one else, — and when they were together, — well, the possibilities of these new steps, Madame Rainault, are simply awful."

"You're just right there, Mrs. Dean," said the sycophant with evident relish, "and you society ladies don't know how the example's taken up either. My girls here say they can hardly persuade their folks to let them go to their little entertainments now. It goes through every class, you see, when you Prominent People start something."

"I think I'll have the ointment after all," came from the lady, which ended that part of the conversation and left a blasted reputation hanging. When Janet was ready the lunch-hour had cleared the establishment, even of the patrons.

So then, this was what people were. — An obvious result of the fire-plaything, — thus horribly to be

talked about. For that was the fact that dominated her mind. No possible harm in Osborne's amusing himself with Miriam Lansing any more than one of her own half-fledged flirtations! Little zest for the married to meet if such philandering was to be tabooed, if conversation was to be restricted to national topics, to the recitation of one another's children's smart sayings, to the discussions on sporting matters. But to have one's name bandied with another's wrapped in base insinuations! The extravagance of society had been the element chiefly to offend her conscience, its lavish activities contrasted with the struggle of others for mere life. Its appeal to the sensations was dubious. But the existence in it of the grosser forms of immorality she had not suspected. She quenched the thought now, determined, nevertheless, to remonstrate a little with Osborne on his conspicuous dancing, to inform him of the chatter.

At lunch, however, she suffered. She felt unpleasantly suspicious that this gay crowd was wondering what she knew, would tear her private life to shreds as soon as her back was turned. And afterwards in the call she had to make on Agnes Price the consciousness of the scandal, empty though it might be, pursued her, seeming somehow to put her in a false position.

For in Agnes's career, hitherto extremely gratifying to the young independent experimenter, a

disappointment waited which deserved to provoke a very righteous indignation.

The mere outer aspect of the door of the girl's tenement gave a warning. Usually neat, the threshold was to-day greasy and a box of refuse almost barred the way. Strident voices sounded within, whether in dissension or accord was not clear, as the metallic intonations of a music-hall favorite, evidently produced by a "Victor," struggled with them for domination. A volley of knocks was required to produce a hush, amid which steps approached.

"Sure thing it's that old —— —— from below, again," came in Agnes's own tones, the epithet being unrepeatable.

"Well, what d' yer know!" the girl exclaimed, as she faced her benefactress and revealed a room where among general disorder one swept in a vision of three riotous-looking men and a lady of the same ilk, a litter of playing-cards over table and floor, and bottles which the men hastily but visibly pushed into their pockets.

Agnes's nerve did not fail her. "These is some of me lady and gentleman friends," she said, tossing her head, "if yer 'd please t' be acquainted."

The lady and gentleman friends, however, seemed to feel the moment opportune for departure and rapidly melted away.

"I was n't sure that you 'd be at home so early," Janet said.

"There's a strike on in the factory," was the reply, as Agnes indolently made a few dabs at restoring order; "we all thought it was time to knock off for a while."

"Where is the baby?"

"Baby's out with the Slaneys. Mrs. Slaney said she'd be so good as to mind him."

"While you were entertaining," Janet said, and while she used the proper note of reproachfulness secretly condemned her own hypocrisy. Agnes, perhaps, was neglecting her child, but how about her own responsibilities? Did she know where her husband at that moment was? Was n't it her business to be with him more now that the session was finished and he had time to kill? Agnes had been indulging in the form of amusement that appealed to her. It was uglier, but surely not worse than the scenes that would probably transpire that evening at the Soames's dance. Yet she would scarcely reprove the hostess whatever the provocation. It was not the first time that the discrepancy between the conduct expected by the upper classes of their inferiors and of themselves had been driven home. It had seemed to belong, however, in the easy list of Things Necessarily So. But that gossip had sharpened her sensibilities.

"Your room looks very pretty," she remarked to Agnes kindly, by way of propitiation, and indeed, except for the disorder, there was comfort, even em-

bellishment. A woven rug, imitation Oriental, flaming in its red and green newness, adorned the floor. Fancy red curtains were in the windows and the graphophone, which had just been performing, imposingly filled a corner. So striking was the air of ease that Janet's first pleasurable thought made way for one of speculation.

Her perceptive faculties aroused, it seemed to her now that Agnes's manner was different, more restless, less assured, than usual. She moved about with a show of zeal for readjustment, but the part looked overdone. When she refused to take a seat one was forced to suspect some unexplained preoccupation.

"This room's all right," she said, unnecessarily slamming a chair from one position to another, "and the neighbors is all right." She seemed to eye Janet from under the corners of her lids. "Some on 'em's got real class. The plumber next door's wife's the parlor kind. She's soft on the kid and passes me over the truck she's through with."

An explanation, this, evidently, to cover the "Victor." But the awkwardness of coincidence, so far successfully evaded, was to prove the extent of Agnes's baseness and a seismic disturbance to the equanimity of her uplifter.

Another knock came at the door, a far more timid knock than Janet's. It was followed by a lady in gray of strikingly middle age with a generally English appearance and a particularly English face with

prominent features and fresh complexion. Though she was tall, she stooped and entered with a deprecating smile.

At sight of Janet she uttered a gentle exclamation and looked from her to Agnes with evident wonderment, continuing to hold the handle of the door.

"Miss Craig," enunciated Janet, rising and holding out her hand. The encounter with Donald Craig's older sister took her also by surprise and awoke a variety of feelings.

"I did n't know that you knew Agnes," Miss Craig said, coming forward. "Excuse me."

The two exchanged glances.

"I am an Associated Charities visitor," breathed Miss Craig. "Agnes came to us before she was quite well. Her work would not support herself and the baby, she said, — until she should be stronger, — without a little help."

"What have you to say to this, Agnes?" cried Janet hotly.

But Agnes had thrown the window open and was gazing stolidly down into the noisy street, as if the ladies in the room had ceased to be. She turned now with tilted chin and faced Janet with undisguised hostility.

"Oh, I suppose the two of yer'll chuck me now, all right," she said.

"And you've no gratitude at all?" exclaimed Janet, astounded.

"If I've got to be a charity case I'd sooner be one thorough and have a live time," declared Agnes with a shrug. She had raised her voice and stepped forward with a truculent manner. One remembered the bottles and could imagine her spoiling for a scene.

"We won't discuss it," Janet said. She felt her lip quivering.

"Suppose we bid Agnes good-bye for the present," was Miss Craig's suggestion, in her rapid, quiet way. She gently pushed Janet toward the door. "I'll come another time, Agnes, — when I can see the baby," she nodded.

She followed Janet out and into the street, then also, acquiescent to her gesture, into the automobile, before the storm that one saw brewing in that sullen young face could break.

"She never breathed a word about you, Mrs. Slade, you know," Miss Craig now explained with unrepressed vehemence, "and of course, as she is not on the books of any Society (I found her dismissed from the Heath Rescue Home), there was no way of checking up her word. But the girl is vivid and strong — I took a particular interest — I never dreamed — This free-lance benevolence is not wise, Mrs. Slade, if you'll allow an older woman's criticism — it really is n't. She might have gone on deceiving us both, drawing on both of us, — no one knows how long, — and living on the fat of the land. I really think it was a mistake."

"So it has undoubtedly proved," Janet returned with some bitterness.

Like one who realizes the full force of a sudden blow only after an interval, the chagrin of her work with Agnes and of the fulfillment of those discouraging predictions, oppressed her. Particularly and generally the case as a Test case seemed to prove her faith in the warmth of human impulse as the highest justification for charity entirely in the wrong.

"According to you," she blurted out rather fiercely to poor Miss Craig, "Agnes would have been better off if I'd let her alone, left her to the cold and universal methods of Organization?"

But Miss Craig was not one to offer the resistance necessary to strike the spark of conflict. She might be an idealist, being of Donald's stock, but she was one of such humility that the will of others was permitted to override her. Janet's emotion did not produce in her the unsympathetic opposition that it would have struck in Mary Ethridge, though she represented the same public-spirited caste.

"They might not have worked any better, — but of course she'd not have got the chance to circumvent them as she has done with you. I'm so sorry at your disappointment," she went on with gentle warmth. Then she added with surprising impulsiveness, "Do you know, Mrs. Slade, sometimes, against my better judgment, I mistrust charity in any form? It seems all wrong for some of us to have to live on the op-

tional beneficence of others of us. I don't really think either those who give or those who receive are ennobled by it. There's always some condescension on the one side, or self-advertisement, and often stupidity. On the other, the self-respecting people cannot help carping, — in that I understand Agnes perfectly, — and it's queer, — and the baser ones cringe. I don't feel as if the real Christian spirit were often there. In fact, I'm quite shocked at my views and I try not to act on them, but it's difficult, — and I can't help honestly feeling that the so-called Christian ideas have just helped to perpetuate an ignoble relationship between the classes."

Janet was astonished to find here, too, in this mild and apparently conventional woman, that recognition of a false bottom to things (call it heresy), which seemed to stir in many an unexpected place. At least it was something of a solace to have a general wrongness rather than her own ineptitude held to blame in this instance. She felt grateful to Miss Craig, and disgustedly banishing Agnes from consideration, asked with a slight sense of warmth for news of Donald.

The inquiry brought a blush to the older woman's cheek. She was probably romantic as spinsters are apt to be.

"The firm sent him to the Philippines you know — after Alaska," Miss Craig said. "He's been there four years now. Of course we don't hear from him

often. It's strange how distance makes people less inclined to write. But he seems to love the place. I suppose he's quite expatriated by now. There was a new venture which seemed promising. The last letter was written five months ago at least."

"I'm glad the news is good," Janet returned perfunctorily as she dropped Miss Craig at her corner and gave the chauffeur orders to stop in Cambridge.

What had life really brought to Donald? In thinking of him after only six years it was strange how much imagination had to be exerted. Could he have changed as much as she believed herself to have changed? It was necessary to strip herself of those differences and try to feel what she used to be, in order to picture him. How little remained of her after that dismantlement! It hardly seemed that the simple creature to whom whole fields of experience were blank could really have been she at all. Probably with him it was the same. Two callow dolls! She would like to see him now, to know him. Yet it might be preferable that he should linger in her mind as a tender god, one romantic fiction in a world of ironic realities.

Jim Garder stood on his steps with tousled hair and hands in pockets as she entered his "yard." The door was open behind and his face was pale with the unhealthy application of the student, so that it appeared he had just come out. He was sniffing the

lilacs, whose untrimmed branches, heavy with blossoms, trailed over the railing of the unswept porch.

"Term's almost up!" he cried to her exultantly, expressive of his unoccupied moment, and he waved at her his bone spectacles, the red grooves of which remained on his nose and cheek-bones. As he spoke he was evidently appreciating her delectable appearance, a contrast to the incidents of his daily life which he enjoyed while he disdained.

"*Dea ex machina*," he punned as the chauffeur deposited a florist's box on the hall-table and touched his cap in hurrying out and past them.

"Is Elsie in?" she asked. "These are some slips of my new English roses she asked for."

"Elsie has joined a Mothers' Club, although there are no symptoms yet of our being blessed," Jim rejoined with characteristic freedom. "But the Mothers' Club seems to be elastic in its scope and she is now present at one of the meetings, either delivering or absorbing an address, I'm not sure which."

"Well, I ought to have started home long ago, anyway," said Janet, but slightly rueful. She felt thirsty for a satisfactory conversation.

"Have a cup of tea with me," suggested Jim; "I don't like being deserted — and it's all ready here. I'll have it out in a jiffy."

He loped into the house and soon reappeared with a small round table all prepared. She sank on a bench under the straggling lilacs, the picture of fatigue.

"What's the matter? Too much Society — or is it Social Work?" Jim asked, bestirring himself with the tea-things.

"Either describes it. I think I need something different," she said. "One of my charity efforts has proved a burst bubble to-day, — and Society, — well, Society has also disclosed to me to-day the fact of Satan lurking."

One of the stimulating elements in her intercourse with the Garders, she realized, was the faculty that it seemed to produce in her of enunciating neat phrases.

"Just another proof of the fact that you can't live on artificial occupations any more than on the most masterly 'still-life' of victuals and drink," Jim said, passing her the cup of tea he had successfully prepared. "It's just as obvious as that and yet 'everybody's doing it,' — or trying to."

"Who, except you, would concede that they are artificial occupations?" Janet asked, for the sake of argument.

Jim seated himself on the steps. "I don't see how there's any question," he said, munching a piece of toast. "Your social life is as impermanent and haphazard as the shifting patterns in a kaleidoscope. Its processes of amusement are as banal. Æsthetically it has a like fortuitous value. It has a right only to be regarded as a toy, destined to speedy rejection. Yes, modern social life is nothing but the plaything of the

transition stage we happen to live in. When the era grows more mature it will be discarded."

"Well," said Janet, "you have disposed of Society. What do you say of social work, or charitable occupations?"

"Charity," Jim returned with aplomb, "is the confession of failure of a defeated social system. It has ceased to be, in anything but the arbitrary adaptation of a term, the fellowship that St. Paul preached. No, it has become the public self-vindication of a class which pretends to worship civilization, — Civilization, — a leviathan whom they picture awake, evolved, whom the thinker must recognize as scarce wriggling forth from the primordial slime, whose efforts at birth they tend to strangle by their devotional rites. Worse than that, in its scarce breathing infancy they would corrupt it, convert it into a fleshly idol rather than a spiritual God, a fetish that they are really trying to drag in the way of the Wheel of Progress."

Janet smiled. "You convince me of your academic propensity for dialectics," she said, "but you don't help me a bit."

"No," said Jim, supping his tea ungracefully. "I can't offer you any hope of contentment or happiness. People in a transition stage must get on without either. They cannot call themselves either fish, fowl, or good red herring."

"A transition stage to what, then?"

"The future knows," said Jim evasively, eyeing her expensive appearance with a mischievous gleam. "But the signs of the times may be read by him that runs. Peace is preached all over the world, but hatred acts and war exists. God has given man a chance through Christianity, but no one can say that he has honestly availed himself of it or of any other revelation. Property is the god from Hades whom we still in reality all worship. You know as well as I that to attack Property is to be considered an atheist — And to worry this old civilization again, with such a Moloch ruling — What is such a civilization but just a term that a dominant class, a dominant nation adopts for its own security? When a jealous interest disputes its sway they howl that anarchy is rife. Civilization is the mask behind which crafty men conspire. Those who feel the pressure of the Wrong, however, being enlightened and armed by the advance of science, won't exist much longer without their share, which the Priests of Property have proclaimed is denied them for their own good by the Will of God. They will arise in their might and demand that opportunities be made equal. That's the true equality, not the impossible one of men. They will insist upon a religion which is not interpreted by a feudal system in its decay, for you know that's just where we still are, with our driven serfs and tribute-money. Sooner or later a cataclysm will come to subvert and shatter this blighted growth for all its hold,

and thereby prepare the ground for undreamt-of harvests — like an actual explosion in the earth. I sound as if I were trying to be a prophet, but I'm only hoping to be an observer."

"Well," said Janet, rising, "I take my leave more confused than ever. Perhaps it would be best to leave my futile Society and Social Science and devote all efforts to cultivating my mind. If one is to be an observer, it would be as well to do it intelligently. But I confess that your predictions rather make me cling to the poor old system, for all its faults, with a kind of homesick feeling."

"I don't believe it suits you one speck better, though," said Jim, as he helped her into the car, "than these turbulent masses we were talking of."

She soon had cause to wonder if it did. As she entered her own house at last after the long ride, the distant door of Osborne's study opened, and from it Osborne emerged with the redoubtable Mrs. Lansing.

Mrs. Lansing, dressed in a well-cut green walking-suit, and carrying a cane, precipitated herself toward Janet. Her eyes were as bright and shining as if they had been filled with belladonna. She smelled strongly of cigarettes. Osborne followed rather slowly behind, one hand in his pocket and the other feeling of his mustache.

"Your husband is too good," said Miriam Lansing. "What do you think he's been doing? — Discussing

some little verses I am guilty of. It is like me to take advantage of a literary friend!"

Janet smiled and drew off her gloves. She glanced from Mrs. Lansing to Osborne and felt surprised that it hurt her so little to acknowledge that he looked like a very great fool.

CHAPTER X

The fact that Osborne's folly had obviously reached a degree which could not be ignored was, nevertheless, on reflection, poignantly disturbing. Superficial and frivolous as his penchant for Miriam Lansing had at first appeared, and perfectly intelligible to Janet as a member of this gay set of his, it was intensified by the lurking odor of that earlier, more serious affair to which he had, in the winter, so casually alluded. Also it was now evident that he was so beguiled as to have become either blind or indifferent to appearances. A recklessness of emotion seemed to have been awakened in him which Janet could not have believed. She had never seen him callous toward impressions that were being created. Like Amelia, he was, on the contrary, constitutionally dependent upon the sun of public opinion. The breach of propriety in the reception of a woman in his own house, behind closed doors, in his wife's absence, was beyond dreaming. The uncharacteristic lapse could not but strike deep into one's store of equanimity.

More distressing, though, even than the apprehensions thus excited, was the crude discovery in their wake. No train of reasoning, however generous, could fail to recognize now the simple, sordid motives that must have been the impulse, whether conscious

or not, of Osborne's suit for her hand. Though perhaps she must accept some blame for having herself entered the union without love, yet it could not, under the circumstances, be said actually to savor of baseness. She had been inexperienced — jealously guarded from experience as a well-bred girl is. Numbness had been the effect of the youthful affair with Donald Craig. She did not know, and there had been nobody to enlighten her, of the vital part that passion must play in life. But Osborne had had no such excuse. For him many chapters had already been turned. It was because of his knowledge rather than through the lack of it — she saw this now grimly enough — that he had married her, that his mother and Amelia, for all their apparent reluctance, had backed him. And it was such an old, old game, — such a trite one, — like the faro to which every day, all over the world, innocence is playing a victim. It had not even the grace of originality or imagination. She wondered how her father could have been deceived.

Yet, again, one had to admit some modifying elements in this villainy of Osborne's. Undoubtedly he had never debated with himself in so many cold words, nor discussed with his relatives, the obvious advantages of the match. There exist situations where insincerity is a saving grace. He must have felt a strong impulsion toward her as well as the awareness of the affluent background. Surely he had taken the marriage vows with every honest intention. The years

of real happiness which had seemed to cement those promises of faith, love, and loyalty refused to be disregarded. Except for Miriam Lansing's reappearance the weakness of the binding mixture might not have been proved. Never, perhaps, she added concessively, in spite of the improbability of an untruth surviving *ad perpetuam*. Anyhow Mrs. Lansing had come, without seeking, and the gush of his real emotion had quickly enough dissolved the unstable welding compound, proving the bad technique of the powers responsible for enforcing it. In so far must Osborne be exonerated.

From this time forth her thoughts persisted in punishing themselves about the affair, all the more tantalizing for its indefinite, half-suspected aspects. One discovered that personal sensibility as well as good taste and moral standards was wounded. Humiliating to find one's self capable of such a dull mistake. Painful to see an individual who had achieved the most intimate place in one's life, suddenly stripped and exhibited in unbecoming nudity. Cruel to awake like this to the illusion of the romantic dream which inspires girlhood. More than all, though, it was Osborne himself who gave her most concern. His stability must now be doubted. The outcome of the thing depended so on that, and his whole career from its small but real beginnings, hung in the balance. Her affection for him, curiously, at this very time, rushed most ardently to arms.

The only usual feeling in such cases that did not touch her was the sense of being slighted. That she had failed to hold him was not a consideration. On the contrary, it almost seemed that she had been the interloper, having cut out Miriam Lansing, having alienated his allegiance if only for a time from her domination. Recent events proved that her own charm had not diminished. It was the less difficult to concede the other woman's claim.

That individual's motives were an interesting speculation. If she had disdained Osborne when a lawful quarry, why, out of all the world of men, did she select him for ensnarement now? Having much distinction as well as allure she could not be classified with the vampire-like female who preys upon the sex without discrimination. There was a romantic depth to her brilliant eyes that all her finished mastery could not veil, and romanticism implies a psychic sensibility which will not stoop to a personal relationship with every chance comer. If Osborne had not been an affinity of the old days, what more acceptable differences did the lady detect in him now?

Whatever it was, and whether superficial or deep, Janet was speedily aware that the intrigue was affecting her own character. She lived in a state of suspiciousness, especially at every entertainment, every chance encounter which brought the pair together. She found herself watching how often they were partners, the intimacy of their talk, their attitude.

Nor was observation reassuring. It was true, as had said the lady of the manicure parlor, that Osborne's eyes were always on the charmer, that his preoccupation with her was conspicuous.

And they met elsewhere. More frequently now, in the new pose of poetess (and she was gifted), the intruder invaded the sanctuary of their house for criticism (which Janet wondered if she secretly despised) or coaxed Osborne to her own charming cottage.

It was June, just before their intended departure for Manchester, in the accepted fashion of leaving great untenanted houses scattered about, that the trend of events first crystallized her resentment to definite form. The direct cause was an episode to wound the thickest skin.

Her nerves, in the first place, had become far from sound. The suspicion divulged to Osborne in that communicative hour when they had first moved out had later been verified. Osborne continued to be sympathetic, but his interest seemed not so keen as on the occasion of the announcement. The novelty of anticipation did not exist, or possibly there were other reasons. . . . Precedent in Janet's case had proved, anyway, that the "delicate" condition was fortunately with her one rather of exhilaration, a phenomenon more frequent than is represented. It was not from that, she knew, that she now suffered ill effects. It was the pace that they had led through May, burning the candle in the dangerous fashion.

Partly, trailing, — also, allied, the stimulation to assuage her resultant restlessness. Fatigue had become something more acute, when suddenly Augustus, ailing now for a few weeks, was declared by the family physician to have appendicitis.

The doctor led her from the child's bedside to Osborne's study and stated in a matter-of-fact way that it would be necessary to operate. She turned in distress to Osborne, lounging in the window-seat with the morning paper across his knee.

"Did you hear, Osborne?" she asked.

"Yes," he said, rising lazily and putting a hand on her shoulder.

"Of course Taylor knows best," he went on in answer to her implied protest, and he exchanged with the doctor glances of superior male rationality.

But her mind already shuddered at the picture of the anæsthetized, helpless child, the operating-table, and the knife.

"Don't you think something else could be done?" she demurred. "Until lately one did n't hear of operations on children much."

"I can only advise you," said the doctor, who had an expression at once anxious and satirical, "according to the consensus of opinion. Of course, though, a consultation can be held if you wish."

"We have perfect faith in you, doctor," Osborne declared. "The little chap's had such a rotten time that I think the sooner it's done the better."

"I prefer a consultation," asserted Janet with some sharpness, the effect of a quailing heart.

"The easiest thing in the world!" Dr. Taylor turned to go. "I'll come out to-morrow with Merriman and Jenks or any other specialists you want to name."

"Either of those fellows is O.K.," said Osborne, going to the door with him.

When he returned to his wife, who stood with compressed lips, gazing unseeingly out of the small-paned window, he took a pipe from the table of elaborate smoking accessories and filled it, saying, —

"By Jove, you must have jarred old Taylor!"

"How?" she asked, still abrupt.

"Oh, you gave him to understand that you considered him rather a mutt, really."

"As for you," she returned, blazing, "what a picture of indifference! I never saw anything so cool — as if a major operation for a little boy of four — your own son — were a matter of the least possible concern. I wonder where your heart is? But perhaps it's as well not to inquire!"

He shrugged his shoulders and applied the flame which mounted and sank with his breath above the tobacco before it kindled it. Then he puffed forth a long column of smoke and strolled toward the door.

"My dear, you really are becoming a virago," was his parting shot.

It did not appease her to know that there was some

justice in his accusation. It hurt her that at this time, considering the subject of discussion, her condition, his own conduct, which he must secretly know warranted anxiety, he should not have stretched a point in magnanimity and made allowance. When she followed him out and made her way down to a nook near a mossy Italian fountain where Mrs. Slade and Amelia, visiting for the month, had been ensconced all the morning with their needlework, her temper was still high and her face flushed.

Amelia raised her lorgnettes when she approached.

"How hot you look," she remarked.

Mrs. Slade also looked up.

"It is dreadfully warm to-day," she said, "and so damp. I've always said what a pity it was to build near water. Osborne will regret it when he's older. Like me he has the Sherrard joints. They're always apt to be swollen in damp localities. Aunt Amelia Sherrard (for whom Amelia is, of course, named) had to remove from Long Island on that account. They now have a most luxurious camp in the Adirondacks which nobody ever uses, since Aunt Amelia died, — her son Brayton, I mean, — our cousin and his wife. — It seems a pity. But it would n't surprise me if we had a thunderstorm later, which would clear the air."

"I'm not particularly hot," said Janet, and her voice sounded hoarse and strange. "The doctor says Augustus has got to have the operation for appendicitis."

Mrs. Slade gave a gasp and pressed her hand on her ample chest.

Amelia looked at Janet with a glance that implied her indiscretion.

"Poor mamma!" she ejaculated, rising and gripping her mother's wrist — to feel the pulse, apparently.

But after a few motions of the throat Mrs. Slade appeared to collect herself.

"I have always said," came her tones of retribution, and her heavy jet earrings quivered, "that you made the greatest mistake in keeping that Norah on. She's a martinet as old servants are apt to be. She has n't the instinct. No doubt she's been feeding the child improperly. It is getting run down brings on appendicitis. Strange how young people will never heed their elders who have brought up families before their day. Look at Amelia and Osborne . . ."

"Yes, look at Osborne!" cried Janet, trembling.

And Amelia, who of course knew, became oddly suffused with a strange, slow blush.

Janet was in a mood, which, while beyond her control, astounded her. She had never before experienced such apprehension or such annoyance. For a moment she was almost terrified by the fancy that her equilibrium was actually leaving her. She bit her lips in the effort to master this accession, and completed her denunciation very lamely.

"Look at Osborne — he does not think very seriously of the operation."

Mrs. Slade then summoned the real kindliness deep buried beneath a surface now disturbed by shock. She declared that there was very little danger nowadays, and finally reached a field pregnant with pathological minutiæ where she could almost inexhaustibly disport herself.

While she did so Janet's equanimity gradually returned, her eye on Amelia whose flush had now subsided, leaving her paler than before. Such a phenomenon, that flush! Janet could not help wondering if it emanated from other thoughts than of Osborne. But she took the first opportunity to seek her own room and divest herself of most of her clothes, to obtain what relief she could on her couch, against the heavy pall of heat.

For one of the few times in her life she spent the day in her room, listless, unoccupied, *épuisée*, trying to recover the power of resistance which had so woefully failed in the morning. And she was able to succeed at last so that the following day found her calm when the physicians arrived.

Their united verdict was, of course, only a confirmation of Dr. Taylor's, but it gave one the satisfaction of having diminished the chances of mistake.

"I suppose you'll have it done at a hospital," Amelia said at lunch.

She was consistently modern in her views. Osborne also mildly thought it advisable. His mother, however, vehemently protested. The idea was to her not

only cold but barbaric. She was voluble and even tearful on the subject, and when her children finally propitiated her by appearing to become convinced, Janet who had not the slightest intention of permitting the child to quit the shelter of her roof, was thankful, nevertheless, that her mother-in-law should bear the responsibility of the decision.

Now that the operation was conceded to be inevitable and seemed to hang over their heads like the sword of Damocles, it was at once harder and easier to face than before. More difficult because there was no mitigation from a possible loophole of escape — easier because one could now concentrate upon the preparations with an undivided mind.

Janet realized that fortitude on her part was an indispensable. She compelled herself to rest during the week preceding the dire event, an interval necessary to cure a slight cold Augustus had contracted — and the unpropitious season of alternate heat and rain made precaution imperative.

A difficulty in itself, this season, because its greatest intensity would have to be braved for the first part of the boy's convalescence. All the arrangements for Manchester had to be changed. Another disadvantage, incidental but not negligible, was the protraction of their stay in Mrs. Lansing's vicinity. She had mentioned that she could not afford a removal (although her purse seemed to cover everything else) and her visits, chiefly at the Shore, were all arranged

for August. And Janet at present would not be able to watch and ward.

Osborne, however, almost disarmed her anxiety by a sudden resumption of old-time devotion. She remembered the aversion he had always shown for sickness or any other form of gloom. Even if in anticipation his visualizing faculty seemed singularly limited, yet this hovering cloud must undoubtedly be distressful to him. Nevertheless, he arranged his in-town business, which, if vague to her, yet appeared to have an actual existence, so that the larger part of his days were at her disposal. He took in charge the readjustment and even the slight alteration in the rooms Augustus was to occupy. He telephoned interminably. He went down to Manchester to supervise things there, and, more than all, the fact of his efficient presence, ready to meet any eventuality, helped her. She wondered, during these momentous seven days, whether, after all, he might not have been misjudged.

Troubles never arriving alone, there was even another matter, embarrassing at this time, essentially hers, and foreign to his sympathies, about which he exerted himself.

One evening when Janet was already counting the hours and attempting to listen to Amelia's firm voice reading a discreetly audacious article from the "Atlantic Monthly," word came that Miss Craig wanted her on the telephone. The name thus suddenly thrust

upon the domestic quiet was doubly startling. In the first place for itself one could not be indifferent. Its mere articulation brought a vague thrill that harked back to the time when there had been a halo about it rendering all others drab and dull, and to the books, flowers, and other tributes of romance it had accompanied. Yet its most recent association was that perplexing affair, that obligation, rather, in which, since the last rebuff, she had been glad (being occupied) not to meddle.

The gentle voice on the line confirmed her apprehensions.

"I'm afraid you were discouraged about Agnes, Mrs. Slade," Miss Craig began, "because I know you've not been back."

In spite of legitimate excuses Janet had a twinge of remorse. Certain old reflections on charity pricked her. It was clear that for all one's enthusiasm one's efforts were necessarily subordinated to one's own life, therefore fortuitous, therefore unfair. She tried, however, to make her reasons for defection graphic.

But Miss Craig cut her short in evident perturbation.

"I continued to visit in spite of Agnes's behavior," she said. "I think I mentioned my suspicions that she had more funds than either of us was providing. My doubts grew as I perceived that my visits were unwelcome. To-day when I went, — I can't describe my feelings, — I found she had disappeared."

"Disappeared!" Janet exclaimed.

"Yes, and left the baby," returned Miss Craig, who sounded remote and almost tearful. "The baby was in good hands, to be sure. That nice Slaney woman has practically adopted him lately, anyway. Such a cunning little thing. Mrs. Slaney's description of recent goings-on in Agnes's apartment made me feel the child is really better off as it is. It's been a rendezvous for a disreputable crowd. But it does n't make Agnes's conduct less shocking."

"I should think not!" was all that Janet could articulate.

Mutely it seemed to her tired nerves that there was a league of adverse forces. She appeared now to have always expected the worst of Agnes. But the unpropitiousness of the event seemed somehow even to presage a dire result awaiting the boy's operation. For the first time she doubted her capacity to cope with the mysterious Opponent.

"What can one do?" she asked.

"Well," came Miss Craig's voice hesitatingly, "of course there will have to be a recompense for Mrs. Slaney's trouble if she will keep the child, as, I am thankful to say, she seems willing to do. I shall be glad to contribute what I can, but I must confess it was that which prompted me to call you up."

"It will be a pleasure to me to assume the whole expense," Janet exclaimed. She was immensely relieved that tangible amends could be made.

Miss Craig thanked her, but seeming to guess her thoughts, did not even yet ring off.

"I hope you won't take too much blame for Agnes, Mrs. Slade. I should hate to think of your taking it to heart. I feel that you were right in believing in her possibilities. It is intelligible, if one is young, — and daring. But I hope it will be an example to bring you to work with us some day."

"Perhaps," Janet returned, too discouraged to commit herself. "I will make a point of seeing to the baby's care — and report to you," she added as a concession.

She left the telephone oppressed by the vision of the forces of Ethridge and Graves triumphant. Osborne's surprising offer to investigate the Slaney family at once for her was the only solace.

But a surface that appears firm is so often treacherous!

The morning of the operation came. The prattle of the unsuspecting child from the nursery wrung Janet's heart while she ascended the stairs with the surgeon Jenks. Osborne followed with Jenks's clever young assistant and the anæsthetizer. Last of all came two nurses. A procession that moved with business-like expedition and cheerful grimness toward what was to Janet the perpetration of a horror! Yet she felt that this was one of the things that she must not spare herself. It was her duty, if not to witness what occurred, at least to hover near, as if her

mere presence could be a protective genius. It was one of the elements of the required discipline, exerted by Providence upon long-suffering motherhood.

Therefore she endured the preparations, the change of doctors and nurses from citizens' clothes to professional, and, it seemed to her, butcher-like white, — the steady persiflage that was bandied between Jenks and his assistants, — the accumulation of basins, — the covering of tables with sterilized material, — the heaping of bandages, — the metallic tinkle of unpacking instruments, — the running of water,— the unstoppering of bottles, — to all of which cold-blooded accompaniment Augustus's cheerful little voice seemed to provide the emotional theme. Horrible, Janet's heart said, while her intellect tried to persuade her that these were the appurtenances of mercy. She uttered an inarticulate prayer, anxious to project her spirit into the realm of the supernal to invoke the Angel of Mercy thence. The annoying little steady whistling through his teeth of one of the assistants clashed so with her mood that she could have screamed.

"Osborne!" she cried to her husband, who stood with his hands in his pockets, looking out of the window in the adjoining room.

He turned toward her and she perceived that curious blotchy countenance of the day of her father's death.

"Damned unpleasant!" he ejaculated. His nerve

seemed more shaken than hers. He felt apparently less obligation than she.

"I'm going down for a pipe," he muttered, sticking his fingers between his neck and the soft collar as if the collar choked him. He passed as if he hardly saw her, stumbling against her chair, and left the room.

Janet sat with twisted hands, compelling herself senselessly to remain. She heard the assistant's whistling suddenly cease, a door open, a surprised inquiry in the baby voice of Augustus, and then a cry of fear. It must be that strangely equipped room that frightened him. Why could n't they etherize him in the nursery?

She rose just as some one opened the door, and Dr. Jenks stood there like a portly ghost, all except his purple face — even his head — swathed in white, and a green shade over his eyes. He was a man of a blunt, half-humorous manner, not prepossessing though famous. He half-consciously jerked his thumb in the direction of the room behind him, after the fashion of the country district where he had originated.

"You can help us out, I think, Mrs. Slade," he said, scanning her with the small, shrewd eyes that had a porcine tendency to lose themselves in his face. Obvious that he was studying her nerve.

So it was she who was appointed to deceive Augustus, she to lead him to the shambles, or so at least she felt! This too was part of the discipline of duty.

She went numbly through the transformed room with all its five other specters. She took by his hand the little child who had backed away from his toys and from his inquisitors.

"Come, Gussie, and see the doctor's big balloon." She achieved the requisite, hideous cheerfulness.

"What's him goin' to do?" Augustus asked, but her presence induced curiosity to get the better of fear. He advanced with her, looking fascinatedly around.

"You come up here on this elevator, my boy," Dr. Jenks said. "Hi, is n't that a fine ride!"

"I've got something here that smells funny," said the anæsthetizer, swinging his bulb and tube, and Augustus, holding his mother's hand very tight, amused, yet beginning to get alarmed again, took the first few whiffs with a shiver. Then he screamed, — but the nurses held him tight, — then he gurgled more and more vaguely, and finally was silent, dropped his mother's hand and lay rigid, with closed eyes.

Janet fled to the next room again and some one closed the door between. She longed for companionship, for the awful stillness now next door was worse than the dread symphony of preparation. It was terrible, that sepulchral silence, broken only by an occasional murmur, or the clink of a utensil, there where all those people were engaged in that sanguinary task. She wished that Osborne had come back.

In about half an hour a nurse stole quietly forth with the air of a conspirator.

"Mrs. Slade," she said briskly, "Dr. Jenks finds there are some complications. He will be longer than expected. Could a message be taken over to Milford not to expect him till afternoon? People of the name of Barstow. He thought if somebody could go and explain, if it would n't inconvenience — might be better than by 'phone. They're rather anxious. He was to meet another doctor there."

"Complications?"

"Not serious," the nurse assured her, — "only fussy. The little chap's doing fine."

"I'll attend to it," Janet said, glad to move.

She found Osborne sitting smoking on the veranda with Amelia. It had been deemed best for Mrs. Slade to pass the day with friends.

"What's the news?" he asked.

"All right."

She felt annoyed with him now for his desertion. She gave him the doctor's message. He jumped up with alacrity.

"It's only seven miles. I'll take the car and drive over myself," he said, obviously pleased by the idea. She was bound to reflect how in crises it is usually the woman who remains. But it gave her pleasure, too, that there was this escape for him.

"Back by lunch," he remarked in departing.

Nevertheless, at lunch-time, when Augustus was beginning to emerge from the ether, and the doctors, having pronounced everything successful, were packed

up ready to go and, incidentally, eager for a good meal, Osborne had not returned. True that one absent in an automobile may be inferred to be a victim rather than a truant. But for once the *sang-froid* of Amelia was welcome. Through the ordeal of the repast she led and sustained the conversation.

Later, too, when there was nothing to do but peer into the room contrary to the nurse's wishes or to rack one's feelings with the sound of the unintelligible moans, Amelia came to the rescue.

"If you can't rest, we'd better walk," she said. "What air there is may do you good."

It was a concession, Janet knew, a really generous effort that approached the motions of sympathy, for Amelia made no secret of the fact that nature, as well as exercise, bored her. Could it be, Janet wondered suddenly, that Amelia herself was nervous? About what, then? It could not be Augustus. One does not worry poignantly concerning the child of another who has passed through an ordinary, perfectly satisfactory operation — at least, persons of Amelia's poise do not. Was it the absence of Osborne, then, that disturbed Amelia?

They set out by a path that led through the woods, already in the sudden climate developed to the point of ripe and even heavy maturity, clothed with monotonous green, like the accomplished impersonality of the conventual garb. An atmosphere which had hung close and sultry for an unbroken space of days

still brooded over all things. The leaves pointed limp, immobile, toward the earth. Clouds of gnats only stirred at their invasion and hovered droningly about them.

But to Janet the sense of relief that came at first with mere bodily activity, with the mere stepping out of doors, gave place soon to the real exhaustion which anxiety about Augustus and the tension of the effort to keep calm had augmented. They had no sooner reached the pool, now enameled with a border of purple irises, where she and the boy had searched for "bollybogs," than a sense of weakness seized her. It was one of those times when the very quickness of the soul would seem to devitalize the body.

Strange that the crises of emotion usually are not simultaneous with the culmination of events. The breaking-point is often not the moment of supreme tension — all the cogs and bearings will amazingly hold good in surmounting some obstinate test; but the strain is there and the breakdown comes when the stress seems past.

Janet tried chiding. An operation nowadays was a bagatelle. Scarce any family escaped the experience. It had become one of the things to expect in the wear and tear. Unluckily a teasing whisper replied that this ordeal was only contributory, that her state of mind really centered on Osborne, the uneasiness for weeks about him, the unexplained absence at such a time.

The clarification of that, she suddenly believed, surrendering in her weariness, might prove the decisive parting of the ways, the positive proof of his untrustworthiness. This was the hinge upon which their union depended. But she was less able to be logical in emotion than in perception. While she struggled to be fair and keep an open mind, her imagination was already leaping to a future of makeshift and discord. Her heart, in fact, had already decided against Osborne, and the bitterness of it was shattering.

Amelia, strolling ahead with silver-headed cane and tailored black hat that well became her classic head, had been discoursing amicably on indifferent subjects. An answer to some remark was required, it appeared, for she turned, interrogatively, and then in an almost impulsive way put a large, ringed hand on Janet's arm.

"Perhaps it's too hot to go farther," she said.

Janet wondered if she appeared so badly. She must pull herself together. She must get the habit of holding the brake hard. Was it not another of fate's ironies, though, that at this moment it should be Amelia allotted her for companion? It was not a firm, well-poised prop she wanted, but just another sympathetically throbbing breast herself to throb against. But the compulsory companionships life provides seem not to be based on fitness. Another of the puzzles! There are whole lives, keen and yearning

but ill-adjusted, condemned by circumstances to the torment of perpetual friction.

It may be salutary. It proved so now. Whatever was in store for her, Janet was determined that it should not be Amelia, — Amelia respectably half responsible for the iniquity of her espousal to Osborne, — it should not be Amelia to witness her flinch.

"Let's go up. There may be a breeze," she suggested with resolution. The winding Italian steps, baking in the unwinking if foggy sun, looked inexpressibly high.

She managed to reach the summit. Amelia followed. They rested gladly upon a stone bench which surveyed the prospect of languid woods and glassy water. The scene painted for Janet the colorless flood of indifference which she felt might after a time succeed in one's veins the surging, evanescent sap of spring. Already the oppression of Amelia's proximity, which had called forth the effort of resistance on her part, failed to bring reaction, like pressure on a dead nerve. If effort must be made, she felt, let Amelia make it, or not, as she chose.

And even Amelia was evidently being taxed by the attempt to be cheerful when an interruption occurred. From the formal path that bisected the terraces appeared a form as successfully complete as the terraces themselves. Moulded into a pale linen gown, beneath a black-and-white striped parasol, came Virginia Higbee. The dress according to the mode

hobbled her steps, but displayed her graceful contour and high-heeled "Oxfords." A jaunty straw hat with "picture" lines finished her.

At sight of them so suddenly at hand she threw herself forward with excessive enthusiasm.

"My dear," she exclaimed to Janet, "I am on my way for news of you — and Augustus."

"He's doing splendidly," Janet replied, yet involuntarily while she said it her eyes swam. The scene of the morning was still too vivid.

"Let's go to the house. It's really cooler there!" she ejaculated.

Somehow the coming of Virginia revived her nervousness.

"Of course it's fearful for a child, but wonderful to have it over," said Virginia, taking her arm, as they slowly moved along. Surreptitiously she transferred the parasol to that hand and mopped her face in dabs with a mauve handkerchief. She looked distressed. She did not enjoy the summer, when she freckled.

"What endless hot weather!"

Amelia said, "You seemed to be in a hurry."

"To tell the truth," Virginia blurted, "I wondered if all was right. Thought something might have happened. I saw Osborne."

She paused, with quick glances of those usually languorous eyes.

Amelia fingered her lorgnettes, clicking them in a way she had.

"When did you see Osborne?" she asked.

"I was in the train. Coming out. As we stopped at Brampton his big new runabout whirled past on the boulevard. They were going toward town."

"They?" queried Janet. The coolness of her own voice surprised her.

"Why, — Miriam Lansing too," — Virginia reddened. "It amazed me, knowing about Augustus. I thought you must have put the operation off."

Janet laughed sharply. At the same time she felt wonderfully in hand, wonderfully strong compared to a few moments hence. She could even examine Amelia critically to see how she took it. But her sister-in-law only looked straighter, taller, more glacial than ever.

"Probably you made a mistake about Mrs. Lansing," Amelia remarked, with cold emphasis. And Virginia deserved it. Gossip was her irresistible inebriant.

She saw, however, that haste had carried her beyond the temerity of angels and she proceeded to defend her truth.

"I'm positive, — Miriam's hat with the javelin spike. Besides, they passed within a dozen yards."

The evidence was too strong even for Amelia. Her usual ivory-like complexion became somehow intensified with a submerged color. When the tint finally died from her face her ears remained unbecomingly pink. Janet alone, feeling the crisis past

and her path henceforth plain, rescued the situation, and even exulted in the mendacious ingenuity that it entailed.

"Of course there was no mistake," she said clearly. "Why should there have been, Amelia? Osborne took a message for Dr. Jenks, did n't you know? And I suppose gave Miriam Lansing a lift into town. This country-side is a hotbed for scandal. I'm afraid you've got some of the poison too, Ginny."

Virginia's discomfiture and Amelia's obvious astonishment were stimulating. If there was a part to play, as seemed to be the case, better carry it off with *éclat*.

After Virginia's departure and later, when it became dark, when their dinner was finished and the evening fell, and still no sign of Osborne, still she sustained it, measuring unseen weapons with Amelia. And she knew that her sister-in-law was amazed at being bested, shaken by that cheerful front of hers which might cover an unrelenting obduracy. Dubious results, perhaps, looming for Amelia!

And when Janet had reached her own room and lay listening to the rustle of the long curtains which could faintly be discerned stirring in the fitful breeze, there certainly where there was no audience, she could study the part usually offered to the neglected wife and the immediate exigency of conduct. She found herself waiting without seemingly acute emotion, rehearsing crushing phrases that she yet knew would

never find articulation. But at times in the terrible slowness of the hours her thoughts, that still trembled for Augustus's sake, made her predicament seem a cross beyond bearing.

At last, at an hour which she disdained to investigate, but which her wearied sensibilities declared must be morning, the thud of the front door came from the distance. In the ensuing quiet her ears, become keen, strained to the utmost, detected the furtive footfall on the stairs. No doubt he was coming watchfully, like a thief in the night, inventing as he came, perhaps, plausible excuses. After a long delay the door opened and he stood silhouetted against the light in the dressing-room before he turned the button. She allowed him to advance before she checked him.

"To-night, Osborne," she then said in a tone that seemed to strike hard on the universal silence, "I'd rather be alone."

She felt that he was startled and moved a step or two. Then he pulled the chain of the shaded lamp beside her and disclosed a face that looked rather bloated, with rather loose lips.

"What's er matter?" he demanded thickly. It was evident that he had been fortifying himself for the encounter.

"Nothing. — Tired," she said.

"All right," he exclaimed as if hurt, but she detected the relief in his voice. He must have expected

a scene. He went out of the room as quietly as he had come.

Little had been said for a momentous parting. Prosaic enough! And she determined that between her and Osborne there should never be more of an explanation than that.

CHAPTER XI

THE recovery of Augustus proved so rapid a tribute to science that it was possible to move to Manchester nearly a week earlier than had been promised. The preparations were to Janet a relief. But they seemed almost deplorably simple. There were still long hours during those two July weeks when there was opportunity for reflection.

The preliminary plan she had sketched helped her only in relation to her outward watching world, but alas! not inwardly. Osborne could hereafter go his way (which he instantly did) with a mute assumption of her tolerance. His genial yet uncommunicative manner seemed to declare that they were now on a most comfortable basis of reciprocative understanding, the only established and luckily prevalent foundation for wedlock, the doctrine, namely, of mutual noninterference. Amelia could subtly show recognition of the wisdom in her sister-in-law's line of conduct, though slightly distrustful, maybe, still of such docility. Janet knew well enough how thin was the crust that covered her own boiling sense of outrage.

Hottest, of course, was indignation for Augustus's sake. The difference in the parenthood of the sexes was striking. Osborne was not a villain. He romped in the nursery with the innocence of a boy himself.

He was only unmoral — and infatuated. No pretense now to the contrary. Just a vision of life empty of responsibility. Strange that it should have taken years and chance to discover it!

The Puritan strain of her stock would not forgive him any the more. She debated radical measures. Was it right now to remain together, acting the perpetual falsehood of felicity? Was it right to rear the child under such a shadow? Were the patched-up arrangements, the mendacious explanations, the disgrace of a separation worse? The necessity of such questions seemed so sordid too. They smacked so of lives that she would not have touched with a rod. And the problem seemed so threadbare. One appeared to discuss it with ghostly crowds of others.

Well, that could be debated, at least, the effect of environment on the adolescent. There was even an argument that the rougher soil produces the diamond, and besides, there is the future for youth, unexplored and potentially fertile. What is there to compare for the woman whose love-story, whose disillusionment, are closed chapters? A mere glance at her own situation could only bring despair. It was ironically evident that the incident which she had believed to close the story of her relationship with Osborne for the future had in reality only conveniently closed it for him. Her bitterness had at first overlooked the fact that the future was not, never could be, closed, but waits forever mockingly, whatever one's trouble,

darting, as it were, from ambush upon the backward-grieving victim, claiming him with forces spent for a fresh combat. The first moments of resentment were bearable, indeed, to the pale struggle that now loomed. For her own sake, too, which were the tactics to adopt, acquiescence or rebellion? All her instincts voted for the latter, yet, strangely, as in the case of Agnes Price, the legions of Propriety and Ethics would then be ranged in opposition. She could not brave them now with that same confidence.

It was curious that at last it should be one of those very Philistines to penetrate the isolation of her suffering.

It happened that the devitalization of the season, and the country-side deserted by its flitting inhabitants, and the tedium of sick-bed watching, reacted upon Amelia. She proposed a house-party for the last week-end. Desire to entertain Janet was the pretext. Amusing the concern that must sincerely be produced in Amelia by Janet's moody abstraction! Approval was instantly given, provided the staging be done for the hostess.

And considering the difficulties Amelia did extremely well. Among her contemporaries she possessed a faithful bodyguard, who did not fail her now; an active widow, Annie Stevens, dispensing her vitality, between husbands, in Causes; Mabel Heatherington, too, unmarried and now anæmic, occupied in shortening the days through reposeful health programmes,

and, in consequence of leisure, well-read and well-informed. Amelia did not attempt exactly to balance the party with males. She was very fastidious and preferred unequal numbers to recruits from unlisted ranks. Osborne, however, came (after conversation) and Guy Burton, to whom Amelia had been occasionally engaged in her 'teens, a conservative bachelor who nested in a few well-chosen houses of the opulent. Then, with an eye to the picturesque, there was Jerome Graves.

It was Jerome Graves, needless to say, who was to prick the festering at Janet's heart.

The moment came on a Sunday afternoon when the others, including Amelia, were on the golf-links. A breeze had risen, a humid breeze that raced through the verdure, driving protestingly into riotous antics the lethargic leaves. Through doors, which it was necessary to fasten back, bizarre and evanescent shadows came leaping till one of the woolly, racing clouds would intervene and slay them.

Janet had come from Augustus's room leaving him to his nap. She entered the room aimlessly, half-fearful of a thunderstorm which would terrify the boy. Dr. Graves, whom she supposed with the others, was examining music at the piano.

The encounter took her unawares. There was hardly time to summon the defensive attitude which the clergyman had hitherto provoked. He had been humble, however, since his arrival, almost diffident

in contrast to the day of that attack about Agnes Price. She was now irresistibly drawn to take advantage of his mien with some retrospective tartness.

"The shepherd may not then follow the sheep to their Sunday golf?" she asked impudently, seating herself in the window and taking her embroidery from the table. "Is it more wicked than this?"

"Much more wicked for me," he laughed, — "much more like work. If you could see me ploughing the field! And imprecations in the embryonic stage, even if I refuse to allow them to hatch."

"Well, how about music? But I suppose that can be classified 'sacred' and 'profane.'"

"Like love?" he quickly took her cue. "But as in the famous picture one feels that the distinction is in truth barely more than skin deep."

"You admit that!" she cried in surprise.

"I said 'in truth,'" he returned quite solemnly. "I did not speak of the counterfeits."

She raised her eyebrows in feigned bewilderment, and changing the subject abruptly, begged him to give her a sample of his music.

Turning to the piano he remarked, "I'm really only good for accompaniments," but plunged into a Brahms rhapsody that caused her to lay down her work and gaze through the window.

When he had finished and the rush of the wind succeeded the music, she murmured her applause. But he became lost, it appeared, and forgetful of her

presence and played again several times, not knowing the heart's-ease that his music brought.

At last he whirled about on the stool, his mobile face uplifted.

"What a tone!" he exclaimed. "Fancy having such an instrument right at hand always. It leaves nothing to be desired."

"And I don't really play."

"How can you help playing?"

"Not in me, I suppose."

"Nonsense," he said, fixing her steadfastly with his gaze. "I feel the response to music in you as one feels an electric current. There is a way of listening that seems to intensify. The air is charged with your music now."

"I do not follow you," she said, resisting his penetration, but the statement was untrue.

Suddenly he mounted his clerical horse.

"There is nothing worse than to deny one's own powers," he said. "Am I presuming too much in believing that you are set in just that kind of denial?"

"Well?" she evaded, not willing either to encourage or to arrest him. The designs he had to intrude upon her private emotions were now discernible. The whole plot was transparent, the leaving him behind for his influence's sake. That he had the influence of magnetism could not be disputed. No woman could be indifferent to his eyes.

"I imagine," he went on with a show of hesitation,

"from the way you tackled that case, — and other things, — that your sensibility is extraordinarily acute, and your emotional perceptiveness, and your fervor for the ideal. Yet I dare say that you would admit none of these rare gifts."

"And if I did admit them," she said, bending her head over her embroidery again, "what superiority do such things constitute unless a superior capacity for suffering?"

"Perhaps. But for conquering too," he declared ardently. "Suppose, for instance, that there was something to face. A brute might flinch and be excused; as a superior being it would be one of the things one could not bear. It would be a descent in rank."

"Well?" she ejaculated again, now curious where he would end.

"It makes my heart ache to see in one so capable of supreme things the one necessary inspiration of Christian faith, the orthodox, lacking," he said, with extreme earnestness. "Perhaps I am an aggressive propagandist. I would like you so to enter our fold. You can't imagine the help . . ."

She arose, dropping her work, to close the now swinging doors. He stopped to pick up the Oriental bag and they met face to face. She looked calmly into his eyes.

"I wonder whether your remarks are general or designed with a special bearing, Dr. Graves," she said gently.

The conviction came that he himself might answer to the description of a rare spirit. They said he was to be made a bishop and dispatched to a foreign — unlovely land. He was essentially the priest militant. He was the soul that would not stoop. But apart from his personality the force of his appeal, for her, was lost. His righteousness was still based on a conventional assurance whose infallibility is its weakness.

"My troubles," she went on with a little laugh, breaking the ice at last, "seem to be more widely known than I suspected. I appreciate your kindness. But I fear that the humility in tribulation that I'm sure you would like to advise is far beyond me. Don't make another hypocrite! I am not a worm, nor wish to be a worm, to whom an unkind tradition gives patience in being crushed. On the contrary, I'd like to sting the heel. . . . I'm incorrigible, or I've got to work out my own salvation."

For the lightness of her manner, her cheeks were flushed. Her tribulation, after all, was no small thing. It was the cancer that grows every day. And she spoke not for herself alone, but, she believed, for doubting ranks. Her words in her stress of thought harked back to the Garders, echoed from those Cambridge discussions.

Jerome Graves's face had contracted as if with physical pain. He looked away from her, outwards at the clear-swept scene. It seemed to give him inspiration.

He said simply, "The Cross is the symbol of submission."

"It's not for me," she cried hotly. "My father's liberal, simple faith, mine, allowed us even as children to think, when we read about the Master and His words. The Cross is the symbol of submission to God, perhaps, but it's the symbol of defiance of man. Who but Christ stands forth the most independent spirit of all time, the least acquiescent to the world about Him and its accepted doctrines? Yet you pretend it is His will that things are as they are!"

He flung his hands toward her in horror.

"The world is steadily advancing under the banners of the Church," he said, almost inaudibly. "You have only to look about you to see the floods that Charity pours forth."

"Yes," she said, — and she felt as if Jim Garder stood behind, — "Charity, which is just power in the *n*th degree endowing those who happen to be blessed with material things with a spiritual Godhood, too, so that they may have no cause to complain against fortune. One wonders sometimes, in viewing the suffering we favored ones permit, whether the God we worship is not still the God of Torquemada."

He struck his hand against his head as if there was a terrible pain there, and cried, "So be it if it must be. True then that 'the strongest wander farthest!' If you must go your own way, Mrs. Slade, I only hope your taste will help you where your ethics fail. A last

warning! See the danger that in denying restraint one may accept license — chaos in denying obligation, the Tempter in rejecting Heaven. My best wish for you is that like Faust your explorations may lead to the spiritual home. I believe in you in spite of all, though. I prophesy that the path of your own choosing will bring you to the self-abnegation of our creed."

"Self-abnegation!" she protested, and felt that her excitement was carrying her far. "Has it ever occurred to you to imagine the sudden appearance of Jesus in the pulpit of one of your fashionable churches? Do you think He would recognize the congregation as His own? Do you believe He would find there the note He sounded in Galilee?"

"I am ready to accept that rebuke," Dr. Graves said, biting his lip. "I don't see that it obstructs the light for those that see."

Janet felt her eyes momentarily hot with tears.

"The truth must be living in order to be able to live by it. Otherwise one must seek elsewhere."

But Jerome Graves was himself disturbed to a point where his feelings got the better of his discretion. The gestures that he had practiced so hard in the elocution class at the Theological School, — and then had tried to unlearn, — involuntarily came to the fore. He shook his forefinger dictatorially. "I fear that your defiance will need much chastisement before the humble, contrite heart is yours."

"If I do come to fall before a shrine," she declared,

"I wish to bend my own back, at least, not have it done for me. Come, shall we hunt up the others?"

She went for her hat, half wishing that it had been possible to accept his authority, the definite programme he was ready to offer, which would have made her way so plain.

CHAPTER XII

THE Slades' estate at Manchester, especially since Osborne's improvements, was one of the finest on the Shore, possessing an enviable site, too, such as the more recent comers had been unable to secure. Smilingly overlooking the lawns of flawless turf which the driveway skirted and screened from the north with pines, it swept on the seaward front a magnificent prospect, with a proximity to the waves almost of an ocean liner's deck, and the sound of them washing the rocks beneath the crest was soothingly, not too insistently, ever present.

It was a sound that held a romantic association for Janet Slade. Many were the changes it had rung. At first grief, then in the happy days with Osborne, a vague sentiment, now again a louder message which she refused to interpret.

The conversation with Jerome Graves had unhappily clinched her sense of defiance. The attitude that she had hesitated to adopt before, once formulated in words had acquired the character of a challenge. In "working out her own salvation," she now believed herself to defy not only conventional conduct (allied in her mind with orthodox conduct), but also Osborne, also her predestined fate. Effort to act justly had so far been rewarded with injustice. Hence-

forth like others she would snatch for the fruit of the world with disillusioned eyes.

She did not have far to go. Society at the Shore was at its fullest swing. A big cosmopolitan society with a little narrow, local, aristocratic nucleus where Osborne already belonged, and which since her marriage she had penetrated. A society where extravagant, unknown, new-time people squandered their money showily, and frugal, well-known, old-time people lived at ease and looked on. It was wide enough to discourage no outsider and narrow enough to preserve its distinction. It embraced, in short, all kinds who happened to have the much-prized card of admission and cared not then what color the card might be. Entertaining! and the serpent was not absent.

In that July every house and cottage (and the hotels on the outskirts of things, so different from foreign resorts) was filled to overflowing. Not only the palaces in their grounds, but the cottages on beach and railroad track, usuriously rented, buzzed with occupants.

Time also was crowded. Endless social events happened at the various clubs — tournaments, teas, and trotting, not to speak of charitable entertainments (that the steps of dancers might hearten cripples); but for the Slades there were also the exclusive affairs *in sanctis* of the inner circle. It meant also business for a hostess. Entertaining is not done for nothing.

Janet managed to revive a thirst for all this like

a toper after enforced abstemiousness. She made plans to excel everybody in opening her house. She enjoyed the pleasant sense of recklessness fortified with the security of enormous funds. For it happened that the settlement of Augustus Bulyon's estate, just accomplished by the leisurely legal processes, revealed a fortune of unsuspected proportions.

Both social occupations and this financial discovery helped the home situation. In spite of Janet's expectations, the boy's wonderful return to health and the fine sea air and the life of diversion revived her looks, her spirits, and her buoyancy. The part she was ready to take in the social life was seconded by Osborne. Fitted was he as never man before to play the major-domo. It brought them together. They appeared together. His manner was irreproachable. No one ought to have suspected (although as a matter of fact most knew) the malignant growth that had permanently destroyed their relationship. Still, the big income increase was a further emollient. The racing-stable expenses had become enormous, though the string of six was referred to by Osborne with pathos. He had already besides a dozen clubs, a share in a New Brunswick salmon river and a recent purchase of a quail tract in Florida. But he wanted two yachts, — a Herreshoff sixty and a roomy "launch," forty feet long, finished in teak, and with a speed of twenty-eight knots. It made a difference, he explained, entertaining the political fellows

(the world would sometime, maybe, reap the harvest of Osborne's political expense). All these things meant a terrible pay-roll. She knew that the allowance her trustees gave him pinched. Now it was possible to bestow lavish presents, and amusing, like some forms of cruelty, to see him dance on her string.

Questions concerning Augustus also solved themselves, paradoxically, through her extraneous activities. Now that he was recovered and his grandmother returned from Bar Harbor (whither Amelia had sent her to visit), and it became further apparent that Mrs. Slade would usually be an inmate of "Pinebank" for all her subsequent summers, the older lady's absorption in him was easier to encourage than to oppose. Janet was even compelled to admit that her mother-in-law did seem to understand the child, to appeal to him more than she herself. With maternal feelings accentuated by her hopes, that was at first hard to acknowledge. She consoled herself with the phenomenon of Augustus's Slade traits, amazing in their purity and invariability. Every day seemed to sharpen them until he might be believed to have had but one parent. That long length of limb, that reddish-blond hair, the calm, firm, little features, the self-possession in company, the clear vision of his own little will. Thinking of the country days of her own childhood, barn-romps, puppies, kittens, and ponies, she regarded with wonder and tender amusement the little boy's pleasure in the long

outings in his grandmother's hired landau and the perpetual calls on other children, arrayed in starched clothes and forever watched by elders. It could not be her duty to alienate him from an existence which, if not her choice, yet served a double purpose so well. Hating to become one of those modern mothers who fulfill their tasks by theorizing what they pay others to practice, she could not but acquiesce, nor disdain, perhaps, in secret the greater liberty it meant.

Liberty, glorious and abused word! Even in the first days of this summer sojourn Janet had an inkling into what fascinating yet condemned mazes that light might lead. The flame of the pure torch upheld by Roman patriots and subsequent spasmodic pioneers could amazingly become transformed into the beguiling, entrancing, elusive, artificial, colored beam accompanying the dancer's feet across a stage engulfed in darkness.

On one of the first afternoons, following a luncheon she had attended with Virginia Higbee (now her "house-guest," as the journals have it), they stopped at the Club where a foreign Champion was expected on the links. The clubhouse was crowded. The heat was intense. The two women sipped lemonade on the piazza watching the picturesque groups across the turf appearing and disappearing in the folds of the landscape, and the still more vivid groups at hand.

People were coming and going in all sorts of costumes, sport-clothes, fluffy summer dresses: Bronzed,

would-be masculine, handsome maidens with rounded, fruit-like cheeks and flower-like lips. Fine-looking youths, still callow, with great Olympian muscles, with eyes and mouths still unrestrained. Dainty, vivacious women. Formal, not wholly gentlemanly-appearing foreigners of the diplomatic colony. Heavy, bland men with yellow eyes, baggy bodies made grotesque by the fashionable rig intended to adorn. Intelligent, clean-cut men with an eye to business even in recreation. Battered women with perpetual cigarettes. Old women carefully dressed and waved and everlastingly watching. And weaving into the pattern all the indispensables of these people, their horses, automobiles, their golf-clubs, tennis-racquets, polo-mallets, tended by the silent critics, caddies, chauffeurs, hostlers, club servants.

In the sudden stir accompanying the approach of the perspiring Champion with his bevy and the signal that it was time to migrate to the polo-field, there happened another arrival, striking even here. A horseman threw himself from a steed lathered with foam that showed in streaks the black, oily hide beneath, and which was tinged at the flanks with crimson. As the groom caught the bridle the animal seemed to groan and followed the man stiffly with muzzle almost grazing the earth. Expressions of indignation became subdued as the rider made his way among the tables, responding as he went to salutations. A dark, clean-shaven fellow with Italian beauty,

— luster and color and animation, — until in momentary repose the face became a curious mixture of brooding passion with New World calculation. His graceful figure showed to its full advantage in the loose white shirt and breeches with tight knee and yellow girdle. He held the hard cap in his hand, and wiped a brow sharply defined by his low-growing hair.

Janet was surprised when he came directly to her. Her spirits had been flagging all day. The marked manner in which, with a slight greeting for Virginia, he brought a chair to her side, very close to her side, was stimulating and reviving.

"So at last you've come," Herman Duer said, seeming to assume a claim. "By Jove, I thought you never would."

"My little boy was operated on for appendicitis."

"Yes, I heard so."

He made no pretense of further interest in the child, turned his attention in fact to the cocktail a servant brought.

"Won't either of you?" he urged, detaining the man with a gesture. "Come, help a fellow out."

Virginia, now included, remarked from her angle, "Is it cooling, Mr. Duer? You look warm already. Have a lemonade on me."

He threw back his head and laughed before swallowing the amber liquid. There was a remarkably boyish vitality about his laugh.

"I've been trying to tame the fiend in horseflesh," he said.

Virginia, having attracted his attention (which she regarded as only normal in a man), and noticing his appraising glance for her figure which she knew to be seductive, made a languid attempt to retain him.

"We all thought you succeeded," she drawled. "He certainly came in a dead one. Thought of calling up the S.P.C.A. You'll have to treat Sumurun better if you paid three thousand, as they say."

"That was a deal, believe me," he returned. But his eye wandered from Virginia, for all her radiance, and she turned with half-humorous disdain to chatter with a neighbor.

Duer leaned his elbow on the table and his chin on his hand with dramatic concentration for Janet.

"It's really been all-fired dull waiting for you to come," he said intently, fixing her with his rapid eyes.

A remark that might be called "leading" and intentionally so. It interested Janet. The man was not her type of man. In her wild-rose days they could not have met. A tribute to the American Beauty, the artifice achieved, that now he sought her out. For his attention was a tribute. A name on every lip! The man's man for his excellent work and play and the woman's because successful, and physically interesting. There was an alluring, disquieting hint of danger for women in his mien. . . . His manner was debonair, sparkling like wine, giving zest wherever he went.

All this was familiar to Janet, having seen much of him during the spring, owing in fact what she knew of dancing, to him. Now the disruption of her home life whetted her interest. His dash of devotion seemed important now in her scheme of things. The discord mutely pervading existence urged her also to find Nirvana where one forgets.

Knowing, however, that even a flirtation could scarce be confined to half-measures with Duer, instinct advised her to be guarded while intellect reasoned that none had less motive for guardedness. She rejected the obvious coy repartee and returned facetiously, —

"I suppose there were a few things to console."

"Don't know about that. There's a flavor when you're around."

He did not echo her lightness. There was a moody sincerity which passed the mark of dallying and gave her rather a quiver.

Charlie Bemis, consulting a waiter at their elbow, interrupted.

"Have one on the championship, Duer?"

"Of course."

And Bemis, also ready for the game, took the seat on Janet's other side that Virginia had left. Herman sat and watched her till the drinks came.

"Come, and show you have n't forgotten the Lame Duck," he soon said, abruptly rising.

A few couples were languidly gliding inside to the

accompaniment of a Victrola. The piece ended as they reached the room.

"Bore, that Bemis," he declared while they waited.

He surveyed her almost fiercely.

"It's your devilish pride, I think, that gets me. Women are so easy mostly, nowadays. If you once kindled I believe there'd be *some* fire."

Then he laughed, obviously to soften the crudity of it.

"My pride's sufficient at least to quench that sort of talk," Janet returned with a coolness that she knew must pique him. "It may suit your 'easy' ladies."

"Stung!" he laughed. "And I apologize. Tell the truth, all nerved up with that beast. And the game's going to be a sizzler. Johnny Whitman's going to kill me if he can. Sorry. But let's not lose the 'Seduction Waltz' for my cheek."

He modified his usual method of dancing to show his real repentance, and entirely changed his line, reeling off a lot of "silly" stuff of which he really was a past-master, and full of wit. At the end of the dance everybody applauded. The needle was started again on the same disk at an intensified pace. Herman, clasping Janet more daringly, broke out into the words in a strong baritone. The other dancers followed suit. Janet, also, unheard in the tumult. When they stopped she was breathless.

On the piazza they encountered Osborne, Mrs.

Lansing, and Mrs. Ogden, on the move like everybody else.

"Come and sit with us," Miriam Lansing said. She always effervesced with fervor for Janet.

But Janet had suddenly decided not to stay for the polo.

"Shall I take you home?" asked Osborne, all dutifulness. Invariably polite nowadays and overflowing with spirits. Things had arranged themselves so well!

"Oh, I think Parkinson can be trusted," she returned with the mildest sarcasm.

Her eyes meanwhile followed Duer for whom the wonderfully dressed Mrs. Ogden seemed to have an interest. Janet's feminine perception grasped at a glance the effect of the other woman's elegance. "Town Tattle" had her the best-dressed woman in America, the result of a prize contest in its columns. This also gave food for reflection of a sort, secondary only to the realization that in the desert of her life some oasis must be found and Duer must not be snatched away.

CHAPTER XIII

It was shortly after this incident which, trivial enough in itself, nevertheless definitely plunged Janet into a sordid game whose unworthiness she ironically recognized yet accepted, that the world itself plunged, even more suddenly, into the foulest game of War.

At the extravagant luncheon-party at the Orlcutts' that last Sunday in July when "civilization" rocked to its foundations, opening crevice after crevice between the nations, the most shallow, the most frivolous persons were dismayed. Remote as was the earthquake, its tremors communicated themselves even to these hearts, its reverberations seemed to threaten even these sunny summer palaces on the far side of the Atlantic.

The incredibility of it vied with the horror, and afterwards, to the credit of most, came the personal apprehension. The word "Economize" was whispered around with bated breath. The closing of the Stock Exchanges seemed to foreshadow bankruptcy. Every one talked loud about the necessity there would be for giving. Everybody secretly planned, as in a conflagration, how best to save his valued possessions. In the flutter and excitement and dread, not unmixed with the heroic thrill that war communicates, with a scent of daring feats-of-arms, Janet always remem-

bered old Martin Orlcutt's remark as he stroked the white chin beard, a relic of humbler days.

"There'll be meat for some one from this all the same," he said to her quietly while the young fellows made pessimistic auguries for the benefit of the table, and his watery, light-blue eyes roved to the masterpieces plundered from the Old World that looked down from his walls. "All the U.S. has got to do is to sit tight. Looks as if the fellow we've put in the White House might attend to it. Then you see somebody's got to pocket the cash the other Johnny spends, and 'I don't mind if I do,' as the kids say."

He had a weak croak of a voice that went with the eye, but somehow — one listened to him.

Nor was it long before it became evident that much of the commotion, in society at least, was artificial. Preoccupation with the War became a pose. Women who were knitting for the soldiers in instances cut down their servants' wages. Made-over dresses became the fashion and it was the fashion to flaunt them. People found the excuse for dispensing with irksome superfluities which their "position" had seemed to demand. Those who lived beyond their income ran to cover with sincere gratitude to the War for finding the pretext.

But even the War to Janet, in her newly espoused philosophy of life as a game of Self for Self's own satisfaction, did not prove an obstruction. The importance of her money, gradually accentuated by

every new experience, was only still more emphasized. The rapid, tremendous events that wrote that August forever red, the Rape of Belgium, opened the gates of universal sympathy, called for the material manifestation of that human brotherhood which Christians profess to believe. One race, of course, was excluded. The Huns, or Boches, or Germans, as one pleased to call them, were repudiated as never a people before, relegated to the fellowship of the Evil One. It seemed a matter merely of common decency, independent of sentiment, to succor the bleeding victims left agonized in the wake of their chariot.

For the first time now in its fullness came the realization of the luxury and power of beneficence. Though Janet's name adorned innumerable lists of annual subscribers, though she casually suspected the importance of her possessions from the endless appeals in each mail, she had refrained from very carefully examining the proceedings of these organizations since the unfortunate experiment of Agnes Price. Her erratic but earnest desire for service had then been discouraged. Her participation in the enterprises of the "hide-bound" institutions since had been listless. Now came the opportunity to give largely, to give directly, for a picturesque, dramatic Cause, to be an instrument, indeed, in history's making.

The pride that Duer ascribed to her was big enough to prevent her from being hoodwinked. With sar-

donic amusement she saw the effect of awe produced on her *entourage* by her first subscriptions; money which she had never earned, money which she only vaguely knew how she came by, money whose deduction from the sum of her property affected not in the least her comfort or convenience. On the other hand, it was plain what advantages accrued from the gifts. If charity covereth a multitude of sins, such generosity as hers would protect almost any sinner.

Not that she included herself nor intended expressly to be included under such a designation. Simply that the instinctive horror for sin of her pure girlhood, the conscientious antagonism toward it of later years, had become undefined and dim. As under the Garders' tutelage she had learned that people exist who regard it a prerogative to question no matter what precept, so she had stretched the point in her disillusionment to believe that most moral edicts were open to doubt. She even jumped to the conclusion that they were probably dubious, basing the deduction on the too obvious insincerity of many of their devotees. She relished the fact, in baser moments, that the community which pretended to admire excellence really was only impressed by display.

The lady who had seemed to interest Herman Duer that afternoon at the Club had provided a hint. Importance of dress stood out among the subtle factors of feminine power. The effectiveness of the right clothes, of interesting clothes, went far. The

unfortunate fact that most people are taken at their face value (to their resentment) was extenuated. Dress could be a great assistance as well as a fascinating pastime, having the means. She determined not to be surpassed hereafter.

Yet real power, real social success, unassailableness, needed something more. Self-study was indispensable, to be diligently cultivated like other arts, for a finished practice. One must be able to regard one's self objectively and from different angles, as in the portrait-painting process. Also comparison must be used, reference to the individuality of others, reference to their taste. Those Others unhappily are needed to balance Self in the picture. The struggle of existence consists in shoving, bribing for a foreground place, to be perpetuated with the crowd behind. And the bribing method was the polite one. Gifts and entertainments would keep the crowd fawning and subdued.

But these elements of the play, stimulating as they were to one's ingenuity, were as nothing compared to that exciting and perilous adventure which now formed her chief preoccupation.

Herman Duer was everywhere that Janet went. He made no secret of the intention to dog her steps.

"Persistence will carry any fortress," he said to her once. "Look at Liège! Look at Namur!"

"Your examples are shameful," she retorted angrily. "Besides, they won't be held."

"Long enough," he returned; and she had reddened, although refusing to see his point.

Considering all things the situation was becoming more complex, more impossible. It shamed her to think. Sometimes she wished that her strength was not what it was. She would like to have been ill and obliged to keep her room, anything rather than this restlessness, this impulse to keep going, this inclination to hold her admirer. Yet the contemplation of dismissing him, of virtue for its cold reward, repelled her. Besides, it was not only she who played at games. He also, and he understood them.

For one thing he managed to convey the fact that he was no pining swain. His achievements were dazzlingly flashed before her eyes. Not only was he the sporting-lion *par excellence*, but he had become the dominant partner in Seeforth and Grafton. His policy energized the conservative firm. His acumen attached coming men to it. His leadership was genius. Conspicuous too for public spirit. His name was advertised every day on the front pages of newspapers as the Collector of Funds for the War Sufferers. The successful man, the clever man, the strenuous man, that was he. A contrast, indeed, to the dilettante, parasitic Osborne, a contrast also to that haloed recollection of Donald Craig with his critical dissatisfaction for reigning forces and infatuation for the ideal. One here who harnessed those forces to his will, and drove them, a veritable Prince of Present

Things. Never, with Janet, did he permit his triumphs to be lost sight of. He came to her like a paladin with obviously artificial languishment, for the real purpose of receiving from her his laurels. Yet not his achievements only, but her half belief in the languishment itself, at least, the desirous will, kept her entertained and excited.

And his independence was a challenge. His *affaires de cœur* appeared to have been so numerous that none took them seriously. He seemed himself to regard them as temporary. Unflattering! While such universality lent safety to one's reputation there was the temptation really to victimize him. He tantalized while he inspired fear.

The consequence of all this was a more rapidly compromising development than could have been anticipated. It was astonishing to have become so acquiescent to his attitude of possession. She was tongue-tied when he danced with her because she felt through every fiber how he made of their dancing an unrestrained embrace. Their evenings under the eyes of the world were evenings of courtship. They held all the mute fascination of things confessed yet unavowed in words. Was he so adept in the game, she wondered, that he realized the potency of the method indirect, the stimulated imagination behind the barrier, sliding, sliding away the supports which a direct assault might only have embedded more deeply?

They were seldom alone. He scarcely seemed to seek solitude with her. That also insidiously weakened the defenses. She had not except once a definite stand to take. By that time things had gone too far for saving.

Late on an early summer morning when she stood in a bright portico awaiting her automobile after a dance, he shoved his way through the group of women in their shimmering cloaks, with nervous men hurrying about in the difficult assemblement of family and chauffeur, and with more than normally brilliant eyes attached himself to her, literally, his hand grasping her arm beneath the voluminous sleeve.

"Send your man away and let me take you — please," he urged. "My car's here."

She hesitated, apprehensive yet inclined to be reckless. He had danced with her throughout the evening with a fervor that had been almost rough. Her dress was damaged, she had noticed, by the closeness of their contact. She felt saturated already with his proximity, his ruthless vitality. She suspected, too, that, ordinarily not a drinker, to-night he had not stinted. The fact that there might have to be further concessions had become obtrusive. Horribly humiliating, considering all things, yet facilitated by his presence which had many of the effects upon her of an habitual drug.

"Well," she said in a manner intended for a protest, but which he instantly assumed to be an acceptance.

"You will!" he murmured jubilantly, and was gone like an arrow.

Mounting beside him soon in the long-barreled runabout, she waved good-bye to others still crowded at the door, half triumphant, half amused at their expressions of covert disapproval, not unmixed, she flattered herself, with jealousy, and fastening tighter the white fox scarf, settled beside him while the machine plunged downward through the avenue, out into the moonlit road, and away on unfettered pinions, over the hill, over the depression, toward the sea which shone in flashing flakes of silver.

Almost superhuman as Herman in his vigor sometimes seemed, it needed all his attention to maintain that pace, but when they debouched into the narrower wood-road that short-cut the approach to the Slade estate, here where the light dropped through the verdure in confusing splotches, he slowed down suddenly, as if to demonstrate the car's flexibility, and crawled along, the engine purring, with one hand on the wheel.

The other slipped around Janet before she was aware. She clutched at it, but found herself a prisoner.

"Janet," he murmured, his lips close to her neck, "you can't keep me at a distance forever, you know."

She put her fist against his cheek and pushed him desperately off.

"Damme!" he exclaimed with a hot breath. "What

do you expect? As if you did n't know. — You're not such an *ingénue* as to mistake this game. I've been damned patient. Cursed New England hold-off, when you know how mad I am about you! Look around. Say you give a few for me!"

Janet seemed to see herself clinging to the edge of a precipice. She would not permit herself yet to drop.

She struggled with the hand until at last he did remove it.

"Well," he said with eyes that darkened like a slowly cooling ember. "Well, then, — but I tell you this meeting's only postponed."

He pressed his foot and mounted to his usual speed, and defying curves and shadows landed her in a few moments at the door.

He lingered while she would have left him dumbly. His cap was in his hand and the electric light shone on his glossy hair and sullen face.

"Can't you say, 'Good-night, Herman'?" he implored, attempting geniality and with a theatrical grimace.

And she was just able to answer, "Good-night, Herman," with a tremulous wave of the hand, shutting the door as he murmured threateningly, "À *demain!*"

In her room she found her maid waiting, asleep. The woman jumped to attention at her approach. She performed the few duties that Janet required and

was dismissed. Janet, in négligée, took a story already issued about the tragedy of Flanders, and tried to read. The wind, which seemed at first warm against her hotter skin, finally became chilly. Trembling she laid the volume down and slid between the sheets, trying not to think. The tide against the rocks sounded so loud in the stillness that it seemed to knock upon her thoughts like conscience, monotonous and insistent, refusing to pause.

To-morrow, yes, unluckily there must be a to-morrow to all this. She, who had claimed to control her own existence, could only contemplate that to-morrow with dismay, with a whirling brain, with a disconcerted pulse.

Conscience declared that the obvious to-morrow must not come, that considering the duty looming, it could not come. On this point there was no reply. If Conscience had pointed to Augustus, there was the answer that her relations with Herman Duer need not affect the boy, that circumspection could confine the whisper to a whisper that need never reach his ears. Had the small voice hinted about Osborne, — a more futile effort still, ten times more futile, lighting the flame of Anger to which alone Conscience always surrenders. She tried to repeat for her own edification that formula of the Garders' which described the moral prick, far from a responsible guide, to be merely a nervous reaction, like fear, developed by evolution for preservative purposes. But this other

voice calling for recognition, supreme responsibility of women, could not be so disposed of.

Yet, was she prepared to strike the death-blow to this stimulating affair? Was she able to snap Duer's hold and lose all the glamour of his ardent companionship? And the alternative (which usually settles things), the increasing disability, grotesqueness, *crises de nerfs*, which with a tender partner might be the essence of happiness, — what became of this when faced alone? For the home that she could have dedicated herself to had become like one of those iridescent, tropic shells which some people keep on mantelpieces, brilliant to the view but all the life gone. And the new existence, in her desperation, seemed too remote to offer a definite, compensating picture. . . .

The situation was unthinkable, yet had to be examined. For, when he should know, — Herman, — not to speak of the world, — and the cackle and the insinuations! Callous as she believed she had successfully made her spirit, it shrank. Each day became more dangerous, though. The policy of ignoring things her health had facilitated, must soon terminate. Her position was like an embezzler's with the first inspection of accounts at hand. The question what to do about it faced her squarely.

Of course there was the loophole of evasion. The idea came like a meteor burning suddenly through the dark. She loathed herself for having grasped its

meaning. She shuddered, incredulous that her delicacy, her reserve, her innocence could have come to flounder in this morass. She closed her eyes, but could not keep them closed. It proved to be a night of falling stars.

CHAPTER XIV

THE following Saturday, a typical summer Saturday, when the avid public relaxes and disports itself, fulfilled all hopes by dawning in perfection. The Shore seemed to sparkle in the holiday atmosphere. Through the villages the Stars and Stripes flirted with the breeze. The water was dotted with sails and shooting motor-boats. The roads wriggled with the files of automobiles. The electric cars were packed to the running-boards. Honkings and clangings and tootings assailed the ear. Even the palaces, inaccessible to the throng, were genial in the brilliant sunlight.

Europe under its war-cloud, whither all thoughts had tended, was to-day relegated to its distance, with the right to live for himself that every man has in vacation.

Osborne, debating after breakfast the plans for the day with Janet and Mary Ethridge, leaned comfortably back in his big Manila piazza chair, with crossed flanneled legs and the usual immense cigar. His aspect was that of *dolce far niente*. He was as picturesque in the perfection of his holiday attire as a man in a cigarette or suiting advertisement. The purple and white of the fashionable boarding-school which had

trained him was flaunted in his tie as well as in the band of the Panama on the table, and his satisfied glance wandered from his equally purple socks to the gentle blue of the quiescent sea.

"By Jove, it's a regular Puvis de Chavannes just now," he murmured, his eyes half closed. "Don't often get it. Usually too sharp."

His artistic sensibility, one of the deepest things about him, Janet knew was fanned by Miriam Lansing. Rather diverting to see his efforts to keep pace with the toneful performances of his inamorata. This was not the first time that he had been caught practicing his scales.

"What did you say it was, and what is It?" asked Mary, absorbed in a piece of tapestry-work which had filled the idle intervals of three years, and with which, although neither artistic nor useful, she occupied herself from the conviction that women's hands should never be idle.

"Boston Public Library," said Osborne with a grin, now moving his indolent eyes in her direction.

Mary, for all her efficiency, was ignorant of many things and apt to become prettily indignant, with that quick color in her blond cheeks, when she found herself ensnared.

"I don't understand you," she protested with some confusion and yet an amusing air of defiance, as if really quite assured that the uncomprehended was nonsense.

Osborne loved banter when there was no danger of its caroming back.

"On the stairs," he said. "Some of them gaze upon the passing crowd. Others look deeply into the waters of Lethe."

Mary tilted her pretty chin somewhat.

"I only go to the Library to see that the proper books are put on the Forbidden Shelf for the school-children," she said. "I never have to go upstairs."

"How profound is the ignorance of the layman," he joked. "Now, I should have selected the *im*-proper ones to shelve."

Mary looked rather puzzled, but after a moment seemed to think that this could be laughed at, which she did — within bounds.

Osborne's eye strayed to Janet, seeking sympathy in his amusement, but his look of satisfaction changed indescribably to one of discomfort.

She was standing beside one of the white colonial pillars, looking off, apparently, though not at Augustus, who ran about with his dog among the pines, but out to some vague distance. Her light figure, her once responsive face, lately become hardened like a clay model of itself, and subtly changed from that expression of simplicity and trust to one of sophistication which Osborne, as a connoisseur, thought really an improvement, looked tense, concentrated on some point unseen, abstracted from their vision.

Osborne's expression intensified. There were pass-

ing instants when she seemed to him so lovely that a kind of whimsical impatience would come for the one who held him slave. Moreover, it were absurd to believe that, with all his hard-shell materialism, his self-satisfaction and his weakness, he yet was free from attacks of remorse and contrition. But if he ever tried to control his impulses it was rather through pressure than uplift. Both character and career impelled him quietly to seek or to reject things according to a scale of purely personal values. It was actually unethical, from his habitual point of view, to court avoidable difficulties, deprivations, disagreeable situations for the sake of a moral point. When the rare accesses of self-arraignment came he was able to wash them away with a flood of exculpation.

The explosions of a rapid motor-boat, passing near and breaking the lazy silence with staccato impudence, gratefully drove one's thoughts at a tangent.

"Well, now, how about Marblehead, girls?" was the bluff suggestion.

Janet turned and swept him with her glance as if he were part of the house, focusing on Mary.

"Does it appeal to you?"

"How are we to go?" asked Mary warily. She was one of those indifferent sailors who, at the seaside, always mistrust the designs of their hosts.

"Well, of course, the roads are impossible. But it can be done."

"You've not even been on board of the Wolverine,"

said Osborne, who had named the "launch" from a lucky speculation, and said that the definition, if not "sea-wolf," yet as "she-wolf" did (euphonically) as well.

"Frankly," said Mary, "I'm not inclined." She regarded the glassy water with an air of concession, however, adding, "Still, there would be terrible dust."

It was clear that she dangled between apprehensions. Germs, considering her avocation, were a great difficulty in her life.

"Why don't you go," she now suggested, "and leave me? I shan't mind. And I'd like to finish this piece. Just one pink bird in the corner."

Janet, however, was not at all suited. She made a point of always having a third with Osborne.

"Come on, Mary," she said, her apathy suddenly charged with nervous impatience. "It's not like waiting for a wind, you know. A perfect day. No distance. Come on."

Mary had ideas about the proper behavior of a guest, so she obediently but ruefully folded her work.

Osborne uncrossed his legs and strolled to an electric button concealed in the wall. A deferential manservant appeared to whom he gave orders that in the first place the captain must have the Wolverine ready in half an hour, in the second that the valet should stow upon her a certain middle-weight green overcoat, leather cap, chamois gloves, cane, and field-glasses, also wraps for the ladies, some provisions,

cigars, cigarettes, and whiskey. There was a short debate about the necessity of gin and vermouth.

"I s'pose we'll be ashore all day as a matter of fact," said Osborne, regarding the man with a worried mien. "Well, put 'em in, put 'em in, Gibbs. Can't ever tell what may happen."

The sea behaved so well on the short voyage that even Mary was delighted, and sat beside Osborne on soft, leather cushions, with a hand on the flashing brass rail, listening interestedly to his remarks on the princely holiday estates they passed, corpulently elbowing each other, with their terraces and pergolas and gardens, occupying every inch of the wooded, rock-bound coast, and valued, according to Osborne's figures, at sums that made one gasp. There were preposterous Goths, it seemed, who were held responsible for the amazing changes wrought in a mere thirty years from Simplicity to Sybaritism. There where an immense salmon-tiled roof nestled among the verdure with a glimpse of white façade, evidently commanding the slope to the beetling foam-bound rocks that faced the sea, an oil-king dwelt, freed now from the primal ooze which had disgorged him this. Next came a great yellow pile, turreted, arched, and gabled to the extreme of elaboration, trimmed with scrollwork of brown and white, dominating the water with native pride, rude taste defiantly imported from the Mississippi, the residence of a genius in sugar. Just beyond there was momentarily visible the plain white

house with green blinds, vine-bowered and shielded by a stone-walled garden, that still belonged to the Masons of Beacon Hill. Then followed more architectural colossi from which Osborne's pointing finger seemed almost to evoke the genii of copper, coal, or steel that one knew must hover there protectingly.

But the "launch," which was "doing its darndest," as Osborne said, and threw above its bow a great V-shaped plume of spray, made such short work of the distance that the flag at their stern began to droop almost before they were aware, and the pleasant, grizzled captain was attentively, slowly threading his way through a tangle of innumerable pleasure-craft, some moving, and many riding gracefully at anchor, seeming, like swans, to watch their own reflections in the glassy water which heaved with so much commotion.

It was one of the great musters of the yachting-world. The harbor was crowded. Great steam-yachts, grouped with military precision, like battleships with all their regalia of pennants, clean-cut, shining, immaculate, breathing of speed and wealth and pleasure; tall-masted sloops and schooners, ninety-footers down to thirties, also dressed and dazzling, epitomes of grace. On the decks were white-flanneled men and women, looking through glasses, smiling, bowing, throwing jests to friends scooting by in "speed-boats" beneath them or to the tanned young fellows on the knockabouts and other small fry, coming in belated

under the desultory breeze along the mid-channel passage between the prows. A brilliant scene of warm sky, gleaming water, dazzling metal, shimmering reflections, shadows jumbled with high-lights, white sails, bright costumes, flags, — along with guns and sirens saluting, joyful voices and orders shouted through megaphones, — and suffusing it all the salty smell of the harbor.

Osborne, after some debate with his "skipper," interrupted by countless salutations as they moved along, came to the conclusion that the sports scheduled would probably be best viewed from the clubhouse, including at the same time more sociability. When Miriam Lansing was seen on the thronged piazza the advantages of the plan were confirmed.

As they advanced along the pier rumors were hurled of a thrill not on the programme, to enjoy which this was also a vantage-point. Percy Ethridge, who resembled his sister in nothing but his almost albino-like fairness, and who had taken his education in life as a member of the big fatherless and motherless family as best he could, had joined her (while Osborne and Mary walked ahead) and first imparted the news.

"They say Duer's going up in his new plane for the long-distance trophy against the profs," he remarked in his characteristic, negligent way. "He's got a nerve!"

"Herman!" Janet ejaculated, taken unawares.

Unobservant as she believed the young man to be, she knew that her concern might betray itself. At the moment that did not matter. She had seen Herman only twice since the night of the dance, but her thoughts had never left him and their "affair." His manner had revealed how there had also been a crisis for him that night. It had changed from dominant to appealing. She was shaken by the thought that his dauntlessness had become daunted by her. Every gesture, every look of his seemed to say now that for him this was the grand passion, that his subjugation was complete. It was the note of all notes to prevail. Her heart responded as at the spectacle of Samson shorn, and she was no Delilah, an emotional spirit, on the contrary, unable to resist, but more than ever dismayed.

His recklessness came to her excited sensibility with a shock that she had perhaps no right to feel. Herman was forever in the front of all activities and especially of novel activities. Since the beginning of the Great War he had been obsessed with the American need of "Preparedness." She knew that long before, even, he had hovered lovingly about the airship works in Marblehead. It was above all things natural that this supreme vehicle of speed should appeal to his mercurial temperament. But the fact that with his small experience he should venture to enter the competitions of the day seemed, in spite of all, unbelievable in its folly.

Opportunity for deploring his rashness was hardly afforded, however, in the press of friends by whom she immediately found herself surrounded. The occasion was one which had drawn not only the indispensable social luminaries, but supposedly lesser lights, infrequently projected from work-a-day obscurity. Even, without warning, she found herself confronted by the Garders. Strangely and persistently dominant as they were in the potent undercurrents of her mentality, so important to her, in the last analysis, as friends, yet they managed by such unexpected sorties to strike a disturbing, secretly annoying, note in the gay band to which she had become attached.

At the present moment Elsie, in a faded and ill-fitting "Alice-blue" linen suit and an overtrimmed hat of cheap materials on the back of an unruly coiffure, approached with conspicuous effusiveness, while Jim in a knickerbocker outfit that seemed never to have known the tailor's iron, noticeable among the immaculate flannels, loomed behind, wisely smiling as usual through his great spectacles.

"Oh, I *hoped* we'd meet you here, my dear!" Elsie exclaimed, entwining her arm in Janet's and quivering partly with enthusiasm, partly perhaps with her own sense of awkward contrast to the finished, *mondaine* vision presented by her friend.

She approached her sun-incarnadined countenance, already peeling, to Janet's with the threat of a salute, but seemed at the crucial moment to reconsider it.

Janet freed her arm and shook hands with Jim, introducing him to Percy Ethridge, whom he ought to have known, with emphasis on the "Professor" (after all, a title has its exculpatory uses), and was herself obliged to meet a merry, dumpy couple in the Garders' wake.

"I have n't heard from you for ever so long," she said, in the next chance, to Elsie, and her voice was full of kind and partly sincere reproach.

It was true, she felt, that in these poignant weeks elapsed since her talk with Jim in the spring, weeks that had changed the whole color of her existence, those razor-edged minds, those warm, honest hearts of theirs might have saved her from the self which she felt, in darker moments, had been perhaps too small alone to meet its fate. Could they still save her? But there was always somehow that invisible barrier which made her long for their free, unfettered opinions, yet unwilling with an equal honesty to disclose her heart.

"What have you been doing all this time?" she continued.

"Same old thing," said Elsie, smiling at her affectionately. "Jim filling and emptying his ash-barrels for the benefit of the students, like the rest. Until term's end of course. But there were the blue-books. We did n't get off till August 1st. We had n't the Where-with, to tell the truth. Since then it's been a heavenly drifting. How about you?"

She rather scrutinized. Janet made the most of Augustus's operation — but Elsie already knew and had sent the child a painting-book, — forgotten, — to her friend's discomfiture. Janet in despair tried to remember what had been unimportant to flit about on and knew that Elsie suspected her.

When Percy Ethridge, who had been looking indifferently on, suddenly seemed to acquire illuminated features and burst out with "Say, Elsie, where's that bone you and I started to pick once?" Janet was glad to escape to Jim.

"I see that after all you don't disdain the haunts of the Plutocrats," she said teasingly.

"Oh, this is vacation," he laughed back. "A real vacation consists in indulging in inconsistencies, in dropping all that one is serious about. Besides, we are doing some haunting ourselves in a typical way."

"How?"

"Behold the Minerva," he explained, pointing past her to the swarming water's edge; but when she failed to discern the object of interest in the tangle of craft, "The Minerva is perhaps too low in the beam for an unfamiliar eye to recognize. Nevertheless, she is bumping elbows down there in the harbor with the proudest of them. She is a house-boat, in short, very near of kin to a mud-scow, in which Elsie and I and the Joneses are fancy-freely and very joyfully being towed from lovely summer resort to lovely summer

resort. Jones, by the way, is the man who discovered the 'Absolute Atom.'"

"How thrilling!" Janet said, with the false note of enthusiasm demanded by the social code, her attention wandering.

Jim insisted on a rebuke.

"You interest me," he retorted, laughing, "as I have never seen a person so thoroughly thrilled before. You'd be surprised, though, if you knew how important a fellow Jones really is. Not a capital in Europe, I wager, where he would n't be received with open arms, — while, let's see, — well, — our showy friend there might pass unknown."

When she saw that he referred to Herman Duer, who could now be seen threading the crowd obviously aimed for her, she flushed and pressed her lips together, but for all her indignation, her gaze dropped before Jim's candid, probing glance. Did even he know something of the tangle of her life, then? Had rumor penetrated also the circles in which the Garders moved? Yet, what more natural, seeing that by fate and choice she was one of those who prance within a crystal ball for the edification of the passer-by?

Duer, thoroughly enjoying himself in a brand-new aeronautical costume, which was varnished like patent-leather and gave him the appearance of some antediluvian creature just emerged from the deep, the cynosure of all eyes, almost ignored the introductions she found it necessary to hurl at him and completely

passed the critical yet reluctantly interested glances of the Garder coterie.

"Come," he said intently and with more excitement than was characteristic. "Let me speak to you just a second."

She allowed him to draw her from the others, to the piazza's edge.

"When these things are over," he said, sweeping his arm toward the white-winged racing-flotilla in the process of moving gently out of the harbor, "or before, if conditions remain so favorable, my time comes. There'll be a few test flights of the usual kind, and then a race to Minot's Light and back, with a passenger. Perfectly safe, you know. Regular old schooners, these hydro-aeroplanes. It would nerve me like the devil to have you along, Janet! We'd be up there, rushing through space, — away from all the rest. — Come, be a sport!"

His darting, vehement gaze seemed to leap at her, to charge her with the galvanic force that seemed perpetually to energize him.

Preposterous proposition, of course, like an invitation to dine in the Planet Mars, almost. Still, in this age of necromancy before which Merlin and Cassandra needs must pale, astonishment itself becomes disused. Janet was far from the temperament, though, to which a "stunt" is alluring. The antics of those startling females who occasionally throw themselves fully dressed into the waves, or appear

publicly panted, or smoke in the streets, or otherwise challenge conventional censure from the security of "position," had only provoked in her amused disgust. Neither conspicuousness, nor danger for itself, had charms. Even the rallying glance of her admirer failed to induce her to consider the thing for a moment.

She was shaking her head at him determinedly, — she was saying, "Don't go, yourself, Herman. Please don't. It's foolish," . . . when suddenly her words stumbled and she stared at him with widening eyes.

"You're not frightened, Janet?" he scoffed.

She knew that to him fear was the only disgrace. He would have put a lie or swindle, in circumstances, first.

She smiled scornfully but whitely at him. He could not know that for a moment he — and everything — had disappeared from her vision. The scene had become chaotic, pierced with one fulminating perception, the incidental straw suggesting the possibility of escape.

"Frightened, Herman!" she retorted, with a volume of intentional provocation in look and voice.

He bit his lip and looked at her and their eyes met full in a way of complete absorption. She felt the master for the first time in their intercourse. She saw him tremble, try to fortify himself, and fail.

"God! if the crowd was n't here," he muttered, clenching his fists, and his face became suddenly flushed and beaded, as if he had been running.

"But you must manage an inconspicuous exit," she stipulated coolly.

He explained rapidly how she might follow him from the piazza after an interval, how to meet him, and left her palpitating.

His going was a signal for Elsie to dart at her again. Janet tried to feign composure — with the use of a handkerchief upon tremulous features. But Elsie was hard to escape. Of course she had been avidly watching.

"Janet, — can't we go somewhere out of this jam and have a little quiet talk?" Elsie proposed. "It's such ages since we have. — And, I don't know, — you won't like it, — but you look hot and tired to me. Your eyes are tired."

"How horrible to look hot!" Janet flung with intentional affectation, drawing away, knowing that her manner must hurt Elsie — aware that Elsie must think her changed, but with how small a suspicion, she commented sardonically, of how fundamental the change was.

Elsie anyway mattered little. Nobody mattered. If in the crumbling of Janet's card-house a few of others as frail should be damaged, the disillusionment could be nothing to what hers had been. Let them build again as she was doing, this time, however, recognizing the fact that one's material was neither steel nor granite. It was too bad about Elsie, too bad about all who had believed in her, just as pitiful as

those pure sentiments and high aspirations of youth. It was Fate, however, not she, who repudiated them. She rejected the responsibility. She claimed to have done her best.

Still, when she saw Elsie wince and turn away toward her little "different" group of people, there was a half-stirred sense of remorse and loyalty which she met with the ghost of a vague promise to make it all up to her some day. Women's friendships, anyway, are so subject to the temper of a passing mood. The cleavages can be bridged as easily as opened. For there would be a "some day" presumably when the tremendous episode in her drama now enacting would give more place on the stage to the other players. At the moment the episode itself demanded all one's attention as well as more than all one's courage.

The details, nevertheless, proved extremely easy of perpetration. Her evaporation from the piazza in the confusion was effected naturally. The neat tender with the impersonal officer and broad-chested, sulky seaman, absurd with his ribboned cap, might have called to take one to any of the friendly, close-lying yachts, instead of to that great hangar across the harbor, where already the fantastic machine could be seen poking forth its nose on the water's verge. And at the shop itself with its picturesque surroundings there were no witnesses to matter, merely eager engineers and mechanics, engrossed in almost meticulous last touches of preparation. Neither, she sus-

pected, had there been leisure for curiosity, would the ascent of the lady have seemed remarkable. It was as well, though, not to be advertised.

Not only easy this, but once on the ways intoxicating; and he was there, Duer, the personification of adventure, with his quick, strong motions as he helped pull in on a line, and his eyes as they flashed occasionally, stimulatingly, toward the lady of his dedication.

She forgot, in the overpowering excitement of at last taking her seat behind him in the sketchy contrivance with its great gray-metaled motor, the scarcely confessed but lightning-conceived purpose. — She had forgotten her weakness — everything. It is possible that historic abominations may be committed with as fleeting intention.

Having become invested with a leather, wool-lined coat and a helmet specifically designed (Herman did not neglect accouterments), she was firmly fixed into the frail-seeming body, wondering if it were really she. Her identity was indeed open to doubt endowed with this foreign intrepidity. Perhaps the man who clambered into the pilot's place and gripped the wheel with his gauntleted hands, after examining rapidly his levers and switches, with his final reassuring glance for her, had imbued her feminine nerves with some of his *insouciance.* She had no qualms when at last he gave the signal, when the men attached themselves to the sides of the craft and

seemed to lift it bodily along until it swung down on to the water.

Up above already circled two other planes getting up speed with sputtering, nut-cracking explosions.

A ground swell had come in which rolled them about. Herman shouted back at her, unnecessarily,—

"Are you ready?"

For a moment the suspense was shattering. She had a sudden access of terror lest she should be terrified. But when he started the engine, the vibration and the uproar of that protesting power overcame even human sensibility. She was drowned with mere waves of sound. She clutched at the stay, she knew not what, before her. They shot forward suddenly with jerking bounds like a bullet glancing on steel, while geysers spurted to each side. They slapped it again, that unoffending, smiling surface, and then began incredibly to rise, defying Nature's last violated law, softly yet impetuously, like a rose-leaf in a gale.

Then, what an experience! Sensations crowded almost sickeningly, requiring unbelievable tension. It was like the naked rending asunder, before one's own eyes, of soul from body. One beheld beneath, already dwindling, vanishing as if mere outlines on a slate erased by a breath, those houses, ships, contours of land, realities of one's material existence, become flat, unreal, jumbled, while the severed spirit darted through the air. No wonder that one shivered at the

miracle, although as a matter of fact the stupendous clamor at first numbed sensation. She might have died up there, she felt, and been unaware of the pang.

As they flew the joy of it came and the stupefaction disappeared. Rather simple, after all, not so different from the exhilaration of a speeding automobile, and in a way, less dangerous. No agonizing curves here, blind corners, dust, or fear of collision. It was a straightaway course. The somersaulting and looping that remains in the spectator's mind from exhibitions was absent. One could relish the contest with the others, who, almost abreast, exchanged places momentarily like great swallows in a southward flight.

Herman at first glanced back once or twice uneasily. Of course he had taken the chances, himself a novice, of a panic-stricken passenger. But although utterly out of reach, he seemed to become reassured. They were stone deaf for all purposes of communication. He appeared to put all his fervor now into the race, excluding consideration of her. He bent like a jockey, an image of concentration. And shortly they seemed to possess the sky, their competitors left behind.

It was an age and yet a moment before they turned the light, pitched to an angle like a yacht around a stake. It was the first real moment of trial. They dipped so low that the end of a plane almost seemed to graze the water. The swell washing away from the

rocks at the tower's base, revealed for an instant black buried crags, like the bottom of the Pit, then engulfed them again in a gray-green swirl. Janet believed she cried out as one does in a dream, half knowing.

Now they glimpsed one of their antagonists flying very high, a mere mosquito. The other was nowhere. As long white ribbons of fog could be seen unrolling between them and the distant coast he might invisibly be tangled.

Herman leaned forward and seemed to struggle with something. She would have enjoyed a pilot of greater experience, although she had reached a stage, as one does in riding a dangerous horse, where excitement tingles through one's nerves and masters fear. Also the physical exertion, which was tremendous even as a passenger, the bracing, the muscular tension came like a great exhilarant after these days of inner conflict. Her companion seemed to get his control, for he settled in his seat again, and they shot suddenly upwards with the velocity of a rocket. They passed their opponent still on his outward lap, well above him, with the earth an impression of vague color-planes far below, as if in the primal stages of creation. She wondered what their speed could be. It had been incredible before. The whole slight framework quivered with the vibration. Could it survive such a strain? And why should Herman, with the cup practically in his pocket, drive so to the utmost?

The answer unfortunately was evident. Like the threads in an infernal weaving machine the strips of fog had imperceptibly united until a great white curtain shrouded all things and seemed to come in folds to meet them. They had descended once more. She supposed him uncertain how to meet the new conditions. In a fraction of time they were swathed in opacity, detached from earth and sea and sky in unimaginable isolation. This was seclusion with a vengeance. It was like being dropped together into limbo.

Herman kept speeding on, nevertheless, for an indefinite period, while, recognizing, as femininity must needs, her utter dependence on his strength and resource, she experienced a sort of lapse of perception, degenerated into a mere respiring organism, sustained by faith in him.

And as the peril increased he did not waver. He betrayed no signs of anxiety while they clove the bodiless leviathan that dimmed their goggles with its sweat, until at last, after an interminable time, a dark mass seemed to pass beneath them. Vague but threatening; and he rose again till they were in the sunshine, but the billowing blanket still wrapped their goal from view. Duer circled about now in obvious indecision, then seemed to dart back seaward. Unparalleled situation, and no chance to pause or consider or confer! She remembered suddenly, too, piling fear on fear, a chance remark of

some one's about this type of flier and its frequent need of gas.

As the thickness came in ever damper from the ocean and one became saturated with the chill of it, she saw that there was little ground for hope. Sometimes these fogs could brood for days. The conviction grew that it was the end. Even Herman was only human. Just a question of minutes and they must drop. He would escape, perhaps, — that luck of his! She believed in his luck after confidence in his power was gone. But the certainty of her own annihilation gripped her. Well, she deserved it. She repeated that over many times as if it helped, primitively torn with an undissected conscience, trying not to visualize the horror that awaited them, the plunge, the breaking, the tearing, the strangling. — But before the actual inevitable moment came her capacity for sensation seemed somehow already to have died, and the paralysis of fear deprived her of consciousness of the final chute and impact.

CHAPTER XV

Afterwards, of course, in the terrible days that succeeded this Dædalian adventure shreds of recollection came to Janet that at the time of her accident had been jumbled into a delirious confusion, a hodge-podge of the real and the unreal equally frightful.

Among these disjointed scenes, all the more vivid that they were isolated, the first was a vision of long, yellow beach stretching into the fog, and agitated human figures looming black against the grayness. Also an unspeakable pressure somewhere smothering a seemingly immeasurable body almost impersonal to her in its boundless pain, a pressure that rapidly brought back that whirling nothingness.

And again, the beach was there and the body that suffered, now being unutterably borne along and in an ardent clasp. Its agony was her agony, though she seemed otherwise detached. But a moan had passed shudderingly forth from the lips and that the lips were her own she knew; she could distinctly remember moistening them and they had been like ice to her tongue. Words even came back that had broken through the bursting sounds in her ears.

"Yer 'ad some luck to strike the beach, Mister," a voice said loudly, "if yer did miss the bay."

The answer was in incisive male tones that seemed

intensely familiar, yet which her scattered wits could not quite identify. It was as if she were running after the voice and the voice were always just around the corner.

"Made a fair guess," it said harshly, "considering. Few yards would have done it. Sand or not we hit —— —— hard."

It was the person then with whom for the moment she could associate only another sort of suffering, the horror of falling. She had known that he would come through, — that impression remained, — but further clarification of the situation was impossible, that also of identity. He seemed not a man, — an agent of fear. . . .

Later she awoke in her own room and bed. It was a far more energetic awakening — and complete — than the others. Things were rounded out now to all their dimensions. The surrounding objects flashed into consciousness with distinct outlines and clear-cut associations. The events up to the moment of the accident were vivid. The body which now sent tormented messages to the brain from defined members was hers without question. It had remorselessly captured her spirit, her ego once more. It had fastened itself upon her to complete the measure of existence, not to be escaped. And it was a most unpleasant habitation. Her tentative tests discovered only more bruises, more seeming dislocations.

The result of the first investigation of things was a

sudden collapse of the nerves. She was surprised to find copious tears running down her cheeks and settling uncomfortably in sticky puddles on the pillow behind her ears. It was still more surprising when a brisk form in white appeared beside her and a sudden hand wiped them not kindly nor unkindly away.

So this must be a trained nurse. Was it hours, then, or days, since that wild expedition? Was she seriously injured? — fatally? Had she survived that horror only, after all, to linger, crippled, perhaps, to brace herself again, shattered, to meet the final hour? And then, — her muscles suddenly contracted at the thought, — how about that other thing, — the impulsive inducement to her ravaged soul to chance it? The emotion of her mind put physical suffering to shame. She was overcome. She approached the subject with awe, too, like a superstitious soldier commanded to demolish a sanctuary. And there was no friendly oracle to encourage. . . .

There was no answer to her queries. Just a red-hot, general sense of torture. She could not even speak yet. Strangely enough she now suddenly came to dread the moment of alleviation, of greater strength, of enlightenment. Better than the spiritual cataclysm that she feared, to lie wrapped here in mere physical tremors, for long hours, not knowing. Better, perhaps, soon veritably to lose one's heritage of life than to face that moral agony. She closed her eyes upon the room whose quietness and order seemed a judgment.

Days appeared to pass in an odd semi-existence. Intervals of sleep succeeded intervals of waking. Nourishment was forced between her lips. The shadows cast in the room were sometimes strong and black against dazzling patches of sunlight that glanced on to the ceiling from the mirror, sometimes were vague, sometimes merged in a universal dimness pierced only by a yellow ray from behind a screen. Vaguely the night-time was least difficult. The hovering obligation to make an effort seemed more remote. No sounds of life then came from beyond. The animation of the wide, ambitious world faded. She half longed at times, though, to follow that light around the screen, to escape from the distorted umbrage. . . .

In all this time, perhaps not so long, she had made no request, nor spoken, nor hardly moved. Somehow she felt unreasoningly afraid of the two strange women suddenly inducted to her room, caring for her impartially by turns, this moment of all moments to desire one's nearest. One was very young, buxom, pretty, very brown as to eyes, hair, and skin. Probably she had just finished a vacation at some "beach." Janet, in less poignant moments of disjointed speculation, seemed to see her swimming with Amazonian strokes, love-making, perhaps, with some impecunious collegian, dancing especially with him in the big hotel "ballroom," sailing with him, and also occasionally with great parties of nice, noisy, common fellow-boarders. She was a sweet, capable,

national type, such as one recognizes as compatriot abroad, in droves, at picture-galleries and other "sights," and recognizes with mixed feelings because so cheerfully unabashed. The night-nurse, on the other hand, was colorless, nearing fifty, expressed chiefly weariness, the incapacity to react any more to any sort of stimuli. Not such as to incite communicativeness, either of them. It made one quail, though, to think what they must know about people, their glimpses into the hidden recesses of lives, the fragments of strange histories, — the involuntary sick-bed confessions, the seamy sides of existences. Even now, without any possible concern for Janet's welfare, with a mere few days' acquaintance, they knew about her what she hardly knew herself.

The only other presence to break the monotony of these first inconsecutive-seeming spaces was that of the physician, Dr. Morris, a visitation less agreeable to her state of mind than even the nurses'. Since her childhood the summer guardian of the household's health, a friend of her father's, the succor of many anxious hours, he had become transformed year by year from the cheerful practitioner of thirty to the worn, unsmiling, older man. Success in the great professions that serve mankind unluckily is this, — too deep in insight, dismal if sublime. He was one of the few persons thus far in her pilgrimage for whom she felt unqualified respect and veneration. The elements that might be called in sum her Better

Nature, which she was trying so hard to brick up, like the picturesque and ghastly claustrations of inconvenient persons in ecclesiastical history, were not yet so subdued but that they audibly rebelled at his approach as if he still might prove their deliverer. No, she was not ready to face him yet.

The effect was that she dissembled. How long she did not know, but it seemed at least a matter of days after the sap of resuscitation really mounted through her veins and her ultimate recovery had to be recognized, that she still closed her eyes when these people approached, acted the part, when she could, of unconsciousness, or, when at least a flicker of life could not be denied, signified her response to the low-murmured questions with barely intelligible sighs and gestures.

Her resilient constitution, however, soon took this policy in hand. The day came when she found that at least half of her body actually belonged to her. There was a kind of ecstasy really, if a reluctant ecstasy, in making daring expeditions around the bed with those limbs that she had feared not so long since might be forever crippled; there was a delicious sense of power in that instantaneous muscular obedience. At last, almost guiltily, when quite assured of Miss Tainter's exit, she actually turned completely over, congratulating her own competence. The fact of striding convalescence could not now be denied. It must also be admitted to the others to-morrow or the

next day. Hunger, actually, vulgar, primitive impulse, was spurring her to win the dreaded strength. It refused to be repressed. She would eat, she would pile up vigor, she would be unable to conceal her improvement. She would have to leave this sheltering bed, get up, dress, — sometime go down, once more take the helm of this complicated vessel (and all the accumulated difficulties of her illness would be saved for her), then strike out again into the world, assume an interest, confront people. It would have to be inevitable. It was repellent beyond belief.

One call there was, one helpful inspiration. She longed for her little boy as really never before, not even in the first year of enchantment. The fascinating need of his infancy for her was already changing to the almost more touching need of her for him. Strange that she had never realized that, how dear that dependence would be! Young as he was, so much too young to feel even unconsciously such forces, he alone had been able to penetrate the terrible isolation of her pain. If human affection is good for anything, she found, it is good for that. If she wanted health she wanted it chiefly now to direct her boy, to renew the influence upon him that a sudden insight, in these hours of introspection, declared that he needed. If the same insight proclaimed the fact that her motherliness had been slack, if the same insight brought her back again, in the inevitable revolutions of reflection, painfully close to that other maternal

failure, it seemed all the more imperative to get up at once, to make the only amends, to take the active part in the boy's life that she had neglected.

It is a long while sometimes, though, before the normal point of view can actually regain possession of its kingdom. There were still invasions of dark hordes to be repulsed. The spirit still quivered through shuddering hours of weakness. She prayed often now. She read the Bible when the nurses were out of the room. But there had been no guide of real conviction in her life. Mystic explorations somehow only persuaded her more earnestly of her own wickedness, the impossibility of redemption. She searched painfully for some spiritual expiation, some way of righteousness. But she was unaccustomed to sainted company and the Dark Angel hovered too near.

The day came, however, when those Others, who in this juncture had taken her impotence in charge, were to interfere with the conflict and force the exigencies of ordinary life once more upon her. Miss Tainter came in one noontime in a state of scarcely veiled excitement. The young woman had a taste in novels, Janet had noted, which would put her on the *qui vive* for domestic dramas.

"Won't you see Mr. Slade — just a moment?" she asked, coyly persuasive, hand on plump hip.

Janet shook her head as she always did at such suggestions. Yet the moment was opportune. The

lengthy sick-bed toilet was just finished. She rested propped on pillows, in a ribboned nightgown and bed-jacket of lace. Two tight but insistently waving braids lay on her shoulders, giving her an expression of extreme if tragic youthfulness, an advantage of which she was vaguely aware.

A sudden view of Miss Tainter's face, where professional concern mingled with dramatic appetite, struck her. What had the girl heard of the Slade *ménage?* What had she not heard? The importance of appearances again strangely insisted on its claim among all the more vital turmoil. Why not see Osborne after all? A sudden curiosity urged her to see him.

Miss Tainter seemed to feel personal gratification at her signified change of heart. She sped out of the room athletically and in a moment reappeared with a dimpling face behind Osborne, as who should say, "See what we've got for a good child."

Osborne himself, thus entering, seemed immense. He filled the doorway, he dominated the room. Scrupulous man, he was to-day groomed to exquisiteness. The neatness and smartness of his summer outfit (for the warm weather persisted) were salient, from the white buckskin shoes banded with green leather and the silk socks to match to the peeping handkerchief bordered in the same shade.

He approached the bed with an easy "Well, this is great business, Janet," and he had an eye for

the young nurse as he spoke, who also seemed to respond. His face, however, empurpling a little, twitched slightly, and the hand in the trousers pocket fumbled nervously under the cloth.

Miss Tainter set a chair for him, taking out the cushion and putting it back with a pat, then turned to the bed, jerked the already neat coverlet and tucked it in again, in rather overdone zeal. She then stepped to the door with ostentatious alacrity, returned for a vase of drooping flowers, and was gone under a benedictory smile which betrayed how much she would have liked to linger.

The interval of facing Janet before conversation was possible had not made things easier for Osborne. He had taken an ivory paper-knife from her bed-table and was running it through his fingers as a violinist feels his bow before the concert. His eyes meanwhile were on his immaculate toes. Nor did Janet care fully to meet his glance. Yet she managed to get an impression. It stirred her with a vague apprehension that his surface bluffness glossed some sinister disturbance. His features seemed fallen together.

"Well, it's taken you a deuced time to pick up," he remarked, shifting his legs uneasily.

A faint sense of wonder began to stir. It was the first feeling akin to interest in things outside her own sensations that had come since the accident. What had been happening to him through all this? She had a sudden suspicion that he might have been resort-

ing to the ordinary solace. The slight dissipations one knew of his youth did recur infrequently. He always looked years older at such times, and that was his aspect now.

"I suppose," she said in the weary, colorless tones that were the best she was able to produce, "that you nearly received a complete liberation."

She was conscious of unworthily testing him with the taunt.

He suddenly buried his face in his hands, elbows on knees. "It's been hell for me!"

She raised her eyebrows, putting dramatic emphasis into her words. "Oh! — for you!"

"Yes," he declared, with simple, and she somehow felt almost childish, misery. "For me, too. Lord, how I've suffered!"

There was something more than mere suffering, though, when his face was disclosed again. It made her uncomfortable in spite of her contempt.

"I suppose you were afraid for *me?*" she retorted sarcastically.

All the unuttered indictment against him revived in full force. He was all the justification she needed, she now felt, for anything, in this world or the next. Her self-incriminations of these dreadful days and nights paled. With scornful relief she assured herself that the burden which had so galled her spirit belonged in reality to him.

"It was n't only that," he said painfully, almost

pitifully. "The doctors seemed to think from the first you 'd pull through. It was the other thing. God! I could n't get over that. You must have been out of your head, knowing —" His words seemed to choke him — "Knowing," he appended with an effort, "the chance it must mean of the child's destruction — as has happened — Do you see where you are?"

He stopped and his pale eyes were actually shot with tears. She could not have believed him capable of such feeling. He took out his handkerchief and blew his nose violently.

But the evidence of his emotion, which even in that instant struck her as a trifle maudlin, was nothing to the emotion now provoked in her.

His words had struck like a bayonet into the vitals of her spirit. It had been one thing to feel sure. It was another thus to have assurance confirmed. But Osborne her critic, Osborne her judge! The indictment turned against her! For that, one saw, was the extent of his presumption. She quivered with anger and with desolation.

She closed her eyes for a few moments, prostrated, yet in some acute inner consciousness curiously scrutinizing the situation.

There was nothing to say. Wisdom dictated silence even if she could have brought herself to attempt exoneration, or, in fact, treatment of the subject from any angle. The bitter waters engulfing her surpassed any conceivable chastisement. There was no crevice

in the wall. The dungeon became forever closed. The certainty which freshened her grief yet sealed it into the vaults of the irrevocable.

Osborne also seemed to recognize the *impasse* they had arrived at. He arose restlessly and sauntered to the window, his formerly almost imperceptible stoop accentuated so that the otherwise perfect coat billowed behind the collar. The whole expression of him was a surrender without honor to the overwhelming demands of human life on human character. A pathetic figure to a sympathetic companion! It was as if at this late age for futile ends a simple lesson in the realities was required of him. The terrible influence of easy omissions perhaps began to be apparent. He was the spectacle of inadequacy awakening to his failure.

But his wife, stung by the unhealing wound he'd dealt her, was long past having searching eyes for him. Having labeled him enemy, she could see no further than their enmity. She believed all obligations canceled, all vows. For her he was forever the experienced, selfish man who had cheated her innocence. His suffering at this moment only increased her ruthlessness. Had she cared to analyze it, she would probably have decided that he suffered nothing more than the horror of the conventional-minded at an outrage to conventions.

Presently, after a few forced remarks in which he mentioned the revival of political activities with the season close at hand and anathematized a railroad

strike which seemed in a complicated way to obstruct his ambitions, he went.

She thought that his visit left her more depressed than before. As a matter of fact it stirred her to the first real effort for recovery. The conversation with him, the resentment it had brought, aroused her. It closed the past. It diverted her thoughts to the future. The hours of solitude, the bed, the room seemed intolerable. She felt that she must have activity, companionship, and at once. And the obvious resource was at hand. All this pining meditation about Augustus, — yet she had shrunk somehow from seeing the boy, had not seen him, had left him to others! There was no time like the present to make amends.

The child was brought to her. She found him ineffably appealing and entertaining. He sprang into the room with noisy buoyancy that would have been insufferable in an older person, but being youthful, brought the resuscitation of youth. He pressed under one arm a disused milk-jar with yellow specks of cotton in the bottom, visible through the greasy glass. As he stopped at her door, not shy, because he had never known shyness, but in fascinated wonder at the dim room, and the quiet, and his recumbent mamma, a sharp voice from outside urged, "Say, now, yer won't take that dirty thing in with yer. And up against yer suit too, — yer ain't had it on an hour! Leave it with Nonie, there's a good boy."

The trend of events was indicated by the response, — and it was only too plain that even Nonie had struck her colors.

"*Goin'* ter show mother my c'lection," he said with disdainful determination, and he ran up to his mother with only the one thought and the incomparable charm of childhood's trust in being understood. His mother's sickness, the weeks since he had seen her, Nonie's cautions, — all were obliterated. In a moment the counterpane was spread with defunct and mostly dismembered representatives of the insect kingdom, chiefly grasshoppers and crickets, smelling mercifully but unattractively of ether.

"Theys'll all stay dead," said Augustus, "till I let 'em live again. Don't be 'fraid."

And the calmness of his omnipotence, considering the circumstances, was reassuring.

The half-hour that Miss Tainter permitted him to remain passed like a flash. Difficult to believe that one could have been so happy! The day closed with joyous prospects of repetition. Blessed were the succeeding days of him. The age where babyhood is shed as a little crab sheds its shell was his, and the pride of incipient boyhood. The very objections which Janet had entertained for his grandmother's training had now to retract before the fruit of it. His manners were maturely considerate. To her present state of nervous susceptibility they were captivating. Then there was the contagious spring of him.

Outside in the hall as he approached one heard the little steps bounding along. Before he reached the door the sound of his coming subsided to a light patter, and finally he entered so silently on tiptoe, that Janet was really startled and pretended, for his delectation, to be terrified.

This was a huge joke with the marvelous quality of never growing stale. He would seize her extended hand, throw back his head, and ripple with joyous laughter. Then she would kiss him, thinking how beautiful he was, a Greuze child with great liquid eyes and tender skin. Finally she would press him to her thinly covered breast and delight in the ecstasy of his heart beating against hers. But like most things connected with childhood, fleeting and elusive, the butterfly, the dainty glory, such exquisite moments fled almost as they came. The boy would push and pull and wriggle, a ball of eager muscle, and dart away like a puppy, usually up into the window-seat whence a torrent of questions, strangely conceived from his panorama, would pour.

She began to note that almost every query from his wondering, little mind would begin with "Grandma says," or, "Aunt Amelia says" — evidence of educators' importance! It was patent that, even so young, the world was colored in tints that it would never lose. Great omniscient beings were interpreting it according to their own lights. His outlook, his habits of mind were receiving a fast dye. This great

universe whose actuality no one knows, being mystically enveloped! — A task for Atlas! Yet these two women seemed to be going about the delicate, dangerous business with unflustered confidence.

"'S'pose Grannie's awful good, but I'm *glad* you like to have me come and see you too, now, muddie," Augustus prattled. "Sometimes it's dreadful lonesome, sure thing."

"Lonesome, Gussie!" cried Janet, shocked and amused at this revelation. "But grandma's always taking you to see other children!"

"Yes," said Augustus, nursing a knee in a fashion imitated from his father. "Me and grannie does make calls, but what I want's kids to play with all the time."

"You do, Gussie?" murmured Janet, perplexed. It was disturbing that he should be sufficiently advanced to have developed this need, and behind that thought was another involuntary one, "What am I coming to to have a child as old as this?"

"Haven't you Parkinson's children at the cottage?" she asked, as if defending herself. It had seemed extremely convenient that the chauffeur should be so respectably married, considering that there were no little neighbors, as the estates lay, to run in.

"Aunt Amelia says I'm not to play with the cottage children," Augustus stated with a manner so strongly favoring his rigid relative that Janet could not help an audible laugh.

"Why, what's the matter?" she asked. "Not measles or anything, I hope?"

The boy pursed up his pretty lips, his big eyes searching his mother meanwhile for the effect.

"Aunt Amelia says I'm too old now to mix with that class. Grandma says those kids what goes to the Public School talk words I must n't know."

Janet laughed again, his manner was so "comical"; but it annoyed her secretly that, invested with authority by her illness, the ladies whom marriage had automatically made her kin should issue mandates in opposition to her simple democratic precepts, eager, it seemed, to extend the cage in which they fluttered over the boy's head too. Amelia so charitably occupied! Mrs. Slade, the champion of benevolence!

Well, candor declared, their barbarism was not worse than her own neglect. Henceforth she would herself be Augustus's preceptor. It was high time, she suddenly found, for him to begin to learn, if not literature and mathematics, at least the preliminary habits of broad perception. The abundance of long summer days of idleness was demoralizing. She had always been an opponent of the kindergarten. She discovered herself now to be an educational theorist. Enthusiasm for inclining this infant in the right direction, not exactly by rule of thumb with alphabets and tables, but by a canny whetting of the appetite, by a method of large suggestiveness that should contrast

with those false, conventional restrictions, filled her. She saw at once, as the landscape gardener sees, the virginal thicket step by step converted to the symmetrical, balanced, blooming work of art, satisfying, "reclaimed." The Slade methods no doubt would have produced patterned geranium beds — or tulips massed!

She actually got out of bed with this new enterprise. She enlarged her domain to include the adjoining "boudoir" and the big, shaded balcony, secluded, with an inimitable view. Catalogues were sent for, then books, and piles lay on the tables, method for the teacher, information for the taught. It was a great resource to skim them, rejecting some and ordering substitutes.

And Augustus responded to this solicitude for his budding mind in a way that was ideal. For the half-hour dedicated to Bible-stories, history-stories, and animal-stories, he listened in silent attentiveness, occasionally shooting forth questions in a nonchalant way that almost seemed deliberate in their complexity.

"What made General Washington so good? Why did God let all those people who got drowned, clinging so desperately to the mountain-tops, *be* wicked if He is so powerful? Did He like to have them wicked so He could send the rain and tell Noah? Why did foxes get punished by the other animals for eating chickens?"

Janet had to admit that with all her investigations

of educational literature there was little light after all on the "Why" of things.

The other two half-hours dedicated each day to reading, sums, and manual work (for which an expensive outfit was bought) were easier. The child applied himself amazingly. He took to the lessons like a game. He seemed to make wonderful progress. Janet secretly bristled with pride.

But amateurs are apt to meet a day of disillusionment. It was at hand for Janet. The novelty for Augustus of constant companionship with his mother in that hitherto forbidden room — its bright things and lovely textures, and the unaccustomed devotion of that winning mother herself — suddenly vanished. He became fidgety during the reading, clamorously preferring to lie on the end of his spine with legs disturbingly fanning the air; he became listless and uninterested in his tasks. The first days of the change were extremely anxious. Janet thought him ailing, but his vigor outside of lesson-hours was a disgrace. There was a private pang then that he must be a dunce. She was ready to label him, as even professionals have done, for a phase. Disappointment loomed. At last came a real tussle. The handsome, intelligent child suddenly stood before her a snarling, stubborn, screaming little beast. He would not have any lessons that day. He would shriek louder and louder, till he foamed at the mouth, if need be, till his throat burst, until this occupation that had become

irksome should be taken from him, until those tyrants in control of existence should permit him to go down with Nonie and hunt for slimy treasures of the seaweed and the rocks. If his mother hated his screams, if he could see the outrage to her nerves in her woeful face, that delighted him. All this was expressed. He made no secret of the pleasure for him in her anguish as a hypocritical elder would have done. His cries only began to subside when his watchful eye detected the crumbling of her defenses and his point gained.

For she did give in. She equivocated. It was not a failure of competence or theories, she tried to believe. Her physical condition merely was inadequate. Many of the new books waiting to be scanned were sent back. For that season at least the enterprise was arrested. In her heart she knew that she had capitulated, not only with Augustus, but with the system that would take him more and more from her, boarding-school, summer camps, college. She had not the courage of her convictions to combat the obvious ways. Having come a cropper over her own limitations, for all her devotion to truth, she managed to persuade herself that it was best for the boy after all.

The attempt at least had definitely brought her back to participation in things. As it became evident that the desired interdependence of her son and herself must be achieved by other than educational means, it became equally evident that the zeal expended upon him must be diverted into some other

channel. She was not alone among women in suddenly becoming the prey of a restive, irresistible, ungovernable energy without any discernible target at which to aim it. The ambition which men can easily find work to appease, the impatience of monotony which they healthily exorcise in many a hearty "spree," were together at times urgently alive in her also, — for all her efforts, from a kind of vague sense of seemliness, to destroy them. One of these accessions took command of her now with tremendous force. All the virtue there was in her and all the passion strained to plunge once more into the phantasmagoric whirlpool of activity. The noble element cried that she must seek some great altruism, some chastening quest, but the other whispered that she was still young, with life not half lived, the cup of experience not half drained. Her frame of mind became so excited, so exalted, that a touch would have hurled her headlong in one direction or another. A beggar might have had her all, a Dr. Graves could have transmuted her into a religious fanatic, — or for a lover she might have flung away the world. She sent the nurses off. She studied her gowns. She began to receive the sympathetic callers who invaded the premises.

Amelia, of course, had long since been ready with her companionship. Her admittance to the sick-room had closely followed Osborne's. Her attitude had been one of cool reproach, easily divined, though carefully not expressed. From the phrases of her

bland, transparent commiseration it was plain to see how she considered the dignity of the name of Slade imperiled by her sister-in-law's rash, conspicuous act. She said only, "It was unfortunate," but one gathered that the gossip had been torrid. Janet saw that Amelia now considered her branded into the herd of flighty persons — and Amelia only countenanced flightiness when it was carried on *sub rosa*.

That there had been more serious criticism than that she could not discover. Impossible to unearth from Amelia's attitude, from a covert questioning of Amelia, either that she herself harbored suspicions of the facts or that the world had whispered. Janet began to feel a grain of reassurance. The secret seemed to have been a secret after all.

It made more possible the return of her thoughts to Herman Duer — intolerable in case he could have known. Yet they would not face him broadly in the daylight. They flickered about him like moonbeams from hurrying clouds. There was a breathless sensation still in the recollection of that moment when she had lain half conscious in his arms.

Nevertheless, his flowers filled her rooms, had filled them from the first, seemed to exhale a particular aroma, exotic, intoxicating, — and the constant reminder that there waited an ardent and yearning spirit. . . . They had not been rejected. No woman is quite above the flattery of such male devotion. She sees in herself again the ancestress of balconies and

serenades, tokens worn in the shock of battle, flung gauntlets and bloody duels. Her attitude toward him might still remain among the things postponed. The effect of shock and sorrow and a dim aftermath of pale, virtuous intention held her aloof. Yet there came a demon in the night at times, the whisper, "You are free now as you could not be before."

An insidious influence, however, struck in from an unexpected source, demonstrating the lamentable fact that the situation one expects to dispose of is frequently itself master. Virginia Higbee, as usual in the thick of things, visiting the enormously rich Desmond Carters at the present moment, brought the news that Herman, as might have been supposed, was "whiling" away his leisure moments in female society.

"Look out, my dear," drawled Virginia, pressing her white-shod toe with the point of her parasol, "or you will lose your beau. This Mrs. Rainsford West is a perfect terror. Fled from San Moritz when the War broke out. Trotted the globe all right. Married to a British officer now at the front and back in the States to settle some property — she says. Lost all her trunks, but has the *sweetest* clothes. Deep, purring voice, very musical. No chicken either. Studied with Jean de Reszke. Every one thinks she is *wonderful,* the way Boston does, you know, when you've had adventures and are well connected, — and she's a niece of old Winthrop Pierce Preston. I repeat, you had better look out!"

Virginia, inveterate gossip, even though sometimes by accident a participant in tragic scenes in the perpetual round of visits resulting from her social ardor, interesting clothes, and universal popularity, almost determinedly refused to allow the possibility of human events being more than superficial, seemed to endow everything she discussed in fact with the ephemeral quality of her own vision, for that very reason amazingly handling topics inviolate to finer perceptions.

Janet, pouring tea on the terrace, found it simplest to adopt the same shellfish tone, stirred though she was.

"Herman Duer would hardly be himself without a woman in the case," she said, smiling successfully for Virginia's greedy eye. "I suppose I can't expect to compete with this charming adventuress with my hollow cheeks and faded eyes."

She wondered whether Virginia ignored the degree her "affair" had reached. One would have said it had publicly passed the point of direct allusion. That was presumably the distinction between the "affair" and the "flirtation." Virginia, however, assumed prerogatives. She had besides an insatiable stomach for this sort of fare.

She now expressed herself again airily, watching as usual her effects.

"You *are* seedy," she said with clever compassion. "What ages you've been. Three weeks — or is it four? Duer's boasting about your nerve drowned

out all the mean remarks, — because, of course, it was a pity that it happened with him after so much talk. I believe it hit him hard. But there's a limit to playing the interesting invalid. Why don't you take a trip somewhere? You and I don't belong to the seductively pallid type, you know. You honestly need your color."

The side-lights from all this easily reached Janet's perception. Nevertheless, the sting of Virginia's insipidity hurt more later, when the poison had had time to circulate. She maintained an impervious front until Virginia, after a fervid embrace, departed, crying from the steps, "You get your roses back before the Hollingwoods' Farewell Ball. It's going to be *some* dance, and you'll simply have to come."

She departed amid the whiz of the motor, a vision of brilliant lips and cheeks and eyes, flaxen hair and whisking chiffon, leaving, perhaps not for the first time, a sense of unrest behind.

It was disquieting to learn even from such a light opinion that the peril existed of losing one's indispensable equipment of "looks" and "fitness." It was a consideration which had not hitherto joined the regiment of troubles. Now it stalked forward to a place of prominence, seeming, to her shame, to take command of all. What fortitude could one indeed muster to meet a conjectural future of faded invalidism, of impotence to charm, bleak, colorless, ignored except for the parasites of wealth? She resolved on

the spot to recover brilliance and buoyancy, to reign again over Duer. She made plans even, — as she entered the delightful house where a scented breeze was lightly stirring the tall gladioli on the table, — how she would see him at once.

Voices came from a distant room, but she seated herself at a white desk painted with Pompeiian garlands which filled a window-embrasure, and took up a pen impulsively — nibbling the end, undecided, considering so much, just how to write.

At last, with hurried strokes, she accomplished a short missive, wanting him, yet not prepared — While she searched for an envelope, her actually trembling hand drew forth a bundle of heterogeneous correspondence (even the desk was disarranged by her incarceration) — Things opened out. The deferred things — wedding invitations — begging letters. — An appeal from a certain deserving, well-organized charity, too, dated six weeks before. With the pen not dry from summoning her lover she wrote out a check for a thousand dollars — sealed and addressed both envelopes and rang for a servant, directing their dispatch.

Then she rose with a step that was almost furtive, making her way through the big house in the direction of the unrestrained feminine chatter.

"Suppose he comes," she murmured to herself, — "or not!"

A bowl of roses confronted her as she passed. He

had sent them. They were salmon-color almost, teas, yet not quite salmon-color, passionately open, with dark-green, clustered foliage, shaded like the tints enameled into the glaze of some old Carthayan jar. She took one from the vase and pressed it against her face, inhaling all the perfume. The odor, merely, of the dominant opiate thrills.

"Of course he'll come," she smiled, with a sudden sense of that historic sway of dynasties, feminine power, — and the horror of uncomeliness and undesirability fell from her, as she entered the room where Amelia and some friends were occupying two tables at "bridge," as a cold, wet cloak might fall.

"Oh, Janet!" almost cried Amelia, with unusual fervor, "we're in despair for a fourth. Alice Evans just calmly said she had an engagement and decamped, if you please. Now, do help us out."

She raised the ubiquitous lorgnettes (she was really blind), scrutinizing Janet anxiously, thinking without doubt that in the first place it would be a supreme bore to play three-handed at one table when somebody had to be "carried," also seeing the profit to her sister-in-law in a little diversion, yet apprehensive, perhaps, lest her moodiness since the accident might break out in some awkward way.

Janet, however, surpassed the brightest hopes by throwing herself into the afternoon's pastime with extraordinary zest. She never played so well. She never was so cordial to Amelia's friends. Everybody

melted at her manners. Meanwhile she accepted Georgiana Pierce's invitation to partake of her own cigarettes, consumed in fact half a dozen during the bout.

When at last she went to her room to dress with the possibility that Duer might come that evening, her head was slightly dizzy but gloriously relaxed. All tension of thought, all that recent ordeal of self-examination, seemed to have mysteriously melted away. The sterner things of life — that conscience with its chains, those bare paths of duty — seemed now the unreal things, exchanged for the evaporating wreaths just now exhaled.

Suppose she had been — well, call it wicked, she thought unemotionally, regarding her dulled complexion and over-lustrous eyes in the mirror; but any number of people had been more wicked, with less provocation too. After all, what was wickedness? Society certainly did not recognize any that it was uncomfortable to recognize. Society did not censure things that never came to light. It was almost pious in the benefit of the doubt it accorded to fair-appearing quicksands. A mud-puddle had to be called a mud-puddle before it switched its skirts. Then it might take a wide turn! But why should *she* be a prude? Ah, that was a convenient name to be afraid of!

Smiling with somewhat sardonic amusement, she opened an ivory case on which her monogram was

raised in gold and extracted from its elaborate contents a hitherto unopened little box, breaking a number of stamps covered with French characters that sealed it. The effect of the pigment was marvelous. She stood transformed, artfully rejuvenated. She tried a broad smile in the glass, delighting in her appearance of knowingness. This also Society would hardly censure, admiring illusions.

The day suddenly occurred to her when she had entered her mother-in-law's house on Marlborough Street after that memorable walk and talk with Jerome Graves. Then, too, she had admired the reflected signs of her advancing sophistication. How innocent and happy she had really been! How long ago that seemed — years ago! And what steps she had since taken in the science! Almost to the point of getting a diploma! He must now be far away. It seemed as remote almost as that youthful parting which even this hardening shell of worldly wisdom would not permit her to remember unmoved.

She turned from the mirror abruptly, succeeding in smiling still.

CHAPTER XVI

The Raymur Hollingwoods, who came from the Outer Darkness, claimed by the Divine Right of Precedent the privilege of annually giving the last ball of the season that was a ball. It shared with other valedictories the advantages of a climax. As it immediately preceded, not only their own departure for Hot Springs, but the general exodus of the Goths, it might be presumed that the social life which continued to dribble on thereafter did n't signify.

Their doughtiest rivals did not grudge them the renown of it. This was partly due to the fact that the real Patricians ignored, or affected to ignore, the very existence of Hollingwoods, while the "fast set," appreciating liberal entertainments, had no inclination to pollute a pot of ointment.

The occasion had won for itself in past years a name metaphorically as lurid as those which our cities actually blaze against the sky at night. Yet it had managed to retain a certain prestige, even to cause heartaches among the uninvited.

The Raymur Hollingwoods were horsey, yachty, and ostentatiously unconventional. "Lollie" Hollingwood, whose nickname savored perhaps of the informal suburb in which she had been "raised," was a vivacious, sallow little creature with nut-brown hair,

and clothes from the rue de la Paix. She dressed almost too well to be smart. The wealth of Sidon, rather than an alluring femininity, seemed invested with these garments and their impeccable perquisites. There was an effect of stress, too, in the standard set by the gowns and the effort to live up to it. It had produced in her an indescribable manner, half-gushing, half-condescending, which may have been presumed to be appropriate to the Society leader. This had become with time almost natural; — not so the "keeping up her position." Nervous dyspepsia had resulted. Her constitution had caved. And in spite of a most helpful husband. Hollingwood was a big, genial fellow, a famous "Eli" oar, whose sociability increased with years. He made a point of knowing everybody and arranged parties. He was a fair polo-player and had a fast schooner-yacht, the Beatrix, which continually added to the rows of silver flagons in his "study." His laugh alone was an asset, seeming to proclaim such simple good-fellowship, — but it was observed that he was rather shrewd in the company he kept. To the list of his advantages might be added the beautiful outing togs he usually wore suggestive of Palm Beach or Aiken.

The house which they had erected on an elevation as near the sea as it was possible to get at the date of their immigration was a peace-pact between the architect and their own desires. Approached by a "drive" that bisected a lawn and was studded with black iron

posts supporting globular lights, it sprawled out upon the rise in a confusion of turrets and gables impending over a stuccoed front. It reminded one somewhat of an inebriate who rests where he falls,—in a jumble,—though the gentleman who received his ten per cent called it a "Queen Anne villa." Yet for all its rambling immensity it seemed that it "cramped the style" of the Hollingwoods' hospitable aspirations. On this account a columned edifice was built among the pines, not dissimilar to a Greek temple, containing squash-courts, swimming-tank, and ballroom, designated by the architect the "Pavilion," but degenerately termed by them the "Bungalow."

Here on the evening of the "Farewell Ball," by the time that Janet and her companions from the same dinner arrived, there was already a gay assemblage. Men and women in fancy dress, some masked, were dancing with an energy that competed with a celebrated orchestra. The atmosphere even now was heated and vibrant. One felt a determination to make this evening excel all other evenings. It needed not the frantic little drummer who threw his sticks above his head in moments of frenzy only to catch them and redouble his castigation of the pig-skin, it needed not the cracked tenor of the pianist who shouted out a refrain, the flashing eyes and swaying bodies of the bizarrely appareled dancers, nor the showers of changing colored lights poured like confetti upon the kaleidoscopic whirl, to convince one of that.

"Well, Mrs. Slade, I *am* glad," Lollie Hollingwood said, her rapid eye darting over Janet, or rather, over her costume, a beautiful Persian "creation" consisting of a plum-colored satin girdle, elaborately embroidered, and armlets of gold, and strings of pearls, and much bareness of neck and shoulder, and voluminous, filmy trousers. And Janet, knowing that she had never been so gorgeously nor so daringly attired, never more seductive nor more brilliant, could applaud her hostess's costume too from the exultation of her heart.

"What a perfect fit, my dear," she murmured mechanically, with an instinct for what would best please the modified Madame de Pompadour with the tired, sharp little face.

She gave herself then to Raymur Hollingwood, magnificent yet droll as Leicester, for the first dance. His eagerness as well as his wife's announced their pleasure at her presence, which in previous years she had never quite conceded. It was one of those ever-recurring little incidents that illustrated almost startlingly to her now ironic self-estimate the native power of her station.

As she endeavored to discover some method in the madness of her host's "fox-trot," she was intent upon sorting out any shreds of responsibility that still might darken the shimmering texture of the new, self-consecrated life. Simple enough to consign them to the winds, what with the cocktail and champagne and

coffee of the dinner that still pumped their exciting impulses through her veins. Besides, this was the night to test her daring and her desperation. Herman, who had returned to her train with such flattering promptness, had hinted that. The moment was imminent when the forbidden plaything might burst into flame. Like the warrior charging into the face of death, she chose, nevertheless, to take the chance of triumph pitted against destruction.

Her eye sought him in the interweaving, fantastic crowd, but sought him uninstructedly, because Dorothy and Gordon Eliot, with whom she had dined, and who had protested about the Hollingwoods' Ball the whole evening until their actual arrival thereat, had deliberately not asked him. Gordon in fact was a thorough New Englander, a frank and loud-voiced prude, but almost completely subject to his demure, roguish little wife, who, while seeming to concur with his staid views, yet managed to take him everywhere and mix him up in everything. It amused Janet now suddenly to discover, in the dangerous-looking *contadino* who steered adroitly through the mazes the *piquante* little Pierrette of a Dorothy herself, — and they appeared to be having a "wonderful" time, — no other than her gay Lothario.

When suddenly the two couples collided in the vagaries of the dance and the first instant of his recognition of her came, she saw the dazzled look that flashed over his eyes, — and the flare of it seemed

to shiver back again electrically from his eye to hers.

The instant that he was free he came to her with an imperative in his manner that surpassed anything before.

"You don't know how you look to-night," he protested, almost rudely extricating her from Raymur Hollingwood's volubility. "You're ravishing." His voice was almost inarticulate as he clasped her. "By God! you've got me just where you want. Only, — after what we've been through together, — don't you believe you're going to take the last trick again."

Suddenly he held her at a distance, as if to sweep her better with his gaze. She was amazed at the passion in his face. He seemed veritably, under the rakish, red cap, with his dark, open throat, the hot-blooded Latin he impersonated.

"I intend to win this game," he mumbled, flattening out his hand upon her almost bare back, "and don't you forget it." Then he laughed as if to break his own tension and added lightly, "Play me all night, you pesky little Scheherezade. This time I hold the trumps!"

She could not answer. She buried her face against his shoulder as they danced. She debated, trembling, what he implied. Did there remain but one dénouement? The excitement and the stimulants of the evening whetted her curiosity and weakened her defenses. This picturesque, virile creature! And that

denunciation of virtue which had become her creed. Could she live up to that? In the fevered state of brain and body it seemed to her that there was nothing she would not do. Half-tones could not be perceived. A world whose whiteness was tarnished had now become all black. Yet strangely, beneath it all, her reckless sensation-seeking self seemed artificial, fictitious, would seem so, she knew, were its career to meet no matter what violent climax. Her real existence appeared gradually to have ended back somewhere in that phantasmal, high-aspiring girlhood.

"If you hold me like that," she protested finally, disengaging herself, "I shan't dance with you any more. It looks too badly!"

She fled breathless to a corner, then instantly whirled away with Percy Ethridge, who had darted forth like a trout for the fly.

While she chattered to Percy's hop she still watched her moody Sicilian, who finally plunged out through the blackness of the open door. What would he do, she wondered? She knew that he was angry. She was afraid of his anger.

As the night slipped away with a surfeit of partners, a surfeit of dancing, and a surfeit of excited clamor, anxiety crept in because he did not return. She did not fear that he would not come back. She feared what would happen when he did.

And at last he came, just as the drummer who seemed to have passed from intoxication into lunacy

began to sound the tocsin for supper. His drumsticks appeared more numerous, as many as the needles of the knitting sheep in the dream-story. He bristled with them and each one seemed to strike his drum with a more penetrating note.

"Come, let's get a bite," said Herman, now seemingly composed, but with perhaps a dangerous sort of composure. "Then I have a plan."

She looked at him sideways, questioningly. She was beginning to feel tired.

"We'll get out of this," he urged, filling her glass. "It's all arranged. Dorothy Eliot's coming. Gordon went home long ago. Percy'll be useful for her. She loves a rather naughty little adventure. Percy'll drive us all in his car. We'll go to the Rockwood Inn, an automobile place where they dance all night. We'll easily shed them."

There seemed to be no objection to this scheme. Her arguments dissolved before she could produce them. Only Dorothy showed when they embarked in the motor the vernacular "cold feet." Janet imagined the sportive little woman to be haunted by her good man even when he was safely tucked away in bed. Anyway, the incident was unimportant. Simply Dorothy rejected the seat with Percy and insisted upon joining the couple in the tonneau. She ached from dancing and it looked more comfortable.

"Besides," she explained, "I've driven with Percy before, and he never speaks. He acts about his motor

as if it might have the blind staggers. He's dreadfully afraid of it, — not to speak of being such a poke — and I'm coming along to be amused — and, I hope, shocked!"

These remarks were accompanied by an air of rather deprecating defiance. Evident that Mrs. Eliot thought they were doing something pretty bad. Janet, having more cause, shivered inwardly. Percy, ludicrous in the costume of a policeman, answered only with an indolent smile from his wheel. Herman, helping the plump little lady in and steering her to the corner so that he himself might sit in the middle, retorted: —

"Perhaps we'll find your Gordon there himself. How'd that strike you? These worthy husbands are usually volcanoes. Pious frauds! I would n't trust him around the corner myself, Dorothy. The Rockwood Inn is where all the fast men go for a lark."

Dorothy seemed positively nervous as they rolled away at Percy's moderate pace, and more so when, after a half-hour's ride through the still September night, they turned into an abrupt avenue that led through woods, impudently lit by their hurrying headlights, and after several minutes approached a dubious-looking building, dark in the upper stories, but vaguely lit beneath.

"What kind of women come here?" Dorothy stammered.

"Oh, the most interesting!" Herman returned.

He sprang out and helped them to alight at the porch, then shouted a few words to Percy who drove away toward a line of automobiles drawn up before a dimly lighted outhouse.

As the clamor of his engine withdrew, the measures of the unavoidable rag-time came from somewhere. It sounded mechanical and rather dreary. Either the windows, heavily latticed, were closed, or the dancing was in the rear. In either case one suspected efforts at concealment.

As they waited for Percy, luminous objects of linear form were to be perceived down to their right, hovering in the blackness like gigantic glow-worms and lazily wriggling in transverse directions.

"What can those be?" Dorothy inquired. Her nerves were now plainly detected in her sharpened tones. "They seem to be Japanese lanterns — with a jag."

"That's the lake," their guide explained. "Boating — swimming — all the sports. This is the resort, by the way, where the Douglases' famous bathing-suit party took place."

His voice contrasted with Dorothy's. It was never more composed. Janet, however, felt behind it the inflexible design. She was all the more convinced from the fact that in the automobile, where necessity had pressed them together, he had sat in rigid silence. It was as if he held himself in leash until the

appointed moment, as if he felt a deadly certainty of holding the moment in his hand.

She wondered at the deliberate tactlessness of thus maliciously stirring the already simmering kettle of Dorothy's misgivings. Perhaps it was only another symptom of assurance.

"What do you say — to *not* going in?" Dorothy now mumbled in her ear. "I don't want to be a quitter — but — or we could stay in the machine and let the men dance if they want. It must be so hot — and at least two A.M.," she added lamely.

It was plain that she felt herself flanked by Scylla and Charybdis, the shame of retreat — the greater shame of evil communications. She could promise well at the post, but she balked at the actual hurdle.

Janet had only contempt for a hesitation which she knew to be based, not on principles, but on cowardice. Feeling, besides, "on her mettle" and by no means prepared to drop this great adventure, she shook her head. And Herman, as Percy's step sounded on the gravel, knocked in a peculiar fashion at the door. It was like a countersign, mysterious, and the door opened mysteriously. As Janet caught her admirer's eye, her body grazing his arm that held the door, she knew that with the power he now held over her it would have been impossible for her to leave.

They entered a dim, stuffy passage with a large-patterned carpet and narrow stairs ascending steeply, the typical New England farmhouse entrance, sug-

gesting cold and economy. A contrast in the uses of its renovation!

An old man in an antediluvian dress-suit held the door-handle on the inside, a dirty napkin over his wrist and gold-rimmed spectacles dominating his face. The unexpected group in fancy costume seemed to stagger him. He blinked at them inimically.

"Society folks!" he murmured, foreign and guttural. It was evident that his thoughts leaped to possible sources of interference.

They were admitted, however, without demur. Herman led the way like one at home, opening one of the three doors in the passage and closing it behind, then into an apartment with hewn beams, diamond-paned windows, and a shelf lined with pewter mugs and plates. A long table was covered with bottles and dishes, over which waiters were bestirring themselves with much swinging of green baize doors into further precincts. The dance-hall abutted like the stem of a T, a big, new-looking place with a polished floor. Its lights were shaded with colored crêpe paper festooned between the chandeliers and darkly speckled with flies. A band of rather low horse-power was performing in some hidden recess, possibly an alcove of the balcony that embraced the hall at the inception of the second story. A row of doors at intervals opened upon this balcony and persons for the most part in simple outing-dress, women in colored sweaters and hats, leaned over and watched the crowd below.

The dance was proceeding with a rather more generally respectable appearance than in the so-called "Society" ballroom. The tone of it seemed rather languid than fervent. Only a few couples were on the floor. Those who did not watch could be seen through the open doors on a lantern-hung piazza, at tables which waiters served from the inner dining-room.

Their own party, of course, was by far the most conspicuous. It was not surprising that the entrance of a Persian houri, a Pierrette, a Sicilian, and a policeman should attract all eyes, that all the other dancers should gradually stop.

"Hateful!" Dorothy murmured, but she trotted away with Herman, and Janet, indifferent to the crowd, but suddenly seized with a hysterical impulse to laughter, submitted to be whirled around the room in the arms of the disheveled policeman for the edification of the public. She did not wonder at Dorothy's distress. The cheap exhibition would have seemed to her, too, degrading, had her thoughts been upon anything except what impended. She was more than half intoxicated too, exhilarated with the mingled sense of triumph and of danger. Suddenly a strange accession of almost fatalistic fear crept upon her in the midst of it all, like a breath of east wind on a stifling day. Destiny seemed to loom above all human chances, holding the warp in its rigid hand. It froze one's laughter.

"I don't like this place, Percy," she gasped into his

large, freckled ear. "It's haunted. All these odd people looking on. Why don't they dance? Let's stop."

They joined the other pair at one of the piazza doors, and Herman, taking the only available table, ordered champagne. Feeling the danger of an anti-climax, perhaps, he turned to the great panacea.

"I came to see a show," Dorothy was fretting. "But it looks as if somehow the parts had got mixed."

"Of course the place is a frost," Herman said ironically, raising his glass. "You ought to have expected that. Like Monte Carlo and lesser dives your sensations are all behind the scenes. We'll have one more glass," he whispered to Janet, "and one more dance — just as you and me — Then what do you say to an excursion on the lake? — The Persian and Sicilian?"

He looked at her hard over the glow of his cigarette. She took one, too, from the open box on the table and nervously lighted it, striking several matches.

"How about the others?" she stammered, yet trying to carry off a jaunty air.

"Let them go home if they like," he said, with meaning.

His words struck cold, but when he took her in his arms for the last dance, she was burning. He trembled against her, too, as if his blood mounted. Her head was on his shoulder. Among the crowd that had returned to the floor she was dizzily aware that none must appear so abandoned as they.

As they were about to stop and approached one of

the doors, his arm guiding her out, a sudden voice shouted from the piazza before them, "Duer, by heck! Well, and Mrs. Slade too. — Naughty! Naughty!"

A chair was knocked over in the dimness, others seemed to be kicked aside, and there appeared in the light slender Charlie Bemis with his mocking face and wide mouth.

"Well," he went on, "seeing you're so disguised, I suppose it's all right. Unexpected pleasure! We'll have out the drinks!" He was more enthusiastic than coherent.

"There are some boys here, too, who'll be just as glad," he went on loudly, pulling them along. "Bunch from town — John Holmes, Neddy Wentworth, and our little prodigal son — you'll remember — Donald Craig."

It was one of those incredible things that insist upon making life unreal, fact that eternally passes fiction. The man whom she had tried to believe successfully forgotten, whose sheltering image she had still conjured up a thousand times, stood there without warning. He faced her with polite tranquillity, changed, yet the same. The first flashing glance that apprehended the bald forehead, the slight, foreign mustache, the finish and ease and solidarity that were new, looked also upwards into an eye as blue and dreamy as it used to be.

The cleanness and the strength of him struck a

contrast with the putrid place like a gun's report in silence. The concussion ravaged her sensibility, shattered to bits her own degenerated essence. In the second of shock and recovery all her false exhilaration fled. She seemed to see herself standing before him, not brilliant but smirched, not triumphant but lost.

She gave him a limp, indifferent hand. The "boys," all more or less the "worse for wear," had taken possession of Herman, had forced him down into a seat, the center of libations. Nothing remained but to take the chair that Donald brought forward. Yet she would rather have suffered anything than this *tête-à-tête*.

"It's jolly to meet you like this," he said simply, leaning an elbow on the table for a frank and friendly survey. "But, if you don't mind — you look awfully fagged just now. Won't you have something?"

She shuddered a refusal. Not that. In the revulsion of feeling that sparkling liquid seemed the sap of evil. The breath of it still in her mouth was sickening. She also leaned forward on the table, planting both elbows for steadiness. To meet him here, at such a moment, required readjustment for the strongest nerve. Yet her feminine mind, half glancing, had time even then to caress the little differences in him, the little acquired changes of attitude and expression. He called her spirit forth to him as he always had.

He managed to find a glass of water, divining what she wanted, without words. She could succeed after

some moments, especially in the half-light, in assuming self-possession.

"I wonder," she said with an artificial archness, "whether you recognized me right off?"

He laughed apologetically.

"Well, I don't know, you know. For a long while, looking through the door, I wondered who you might be. When Bemis bagged you, it seemed as if I'd known all the time."

She was silent while a horde of feelings contended for the mastery. Suddenly the cruelty of his leaving her came back with shocking force. The picture of what life might have been if he had not was far more vivid now than ever. The contrasts were many times intensified. A slow resentment toward him for the fulfillment of his youthful promise in which she had had no part, and for the spectacle of her own character at the depth of its degradation, began to glow red. She ceased to droop. She held her head up sharply and pushed back her chair.

"Perhaps you'll come and see us," she said with a hard intonation. "It's time to go."

"Please don't — so soon," he protested. "Is your husband here? I'd like to meet him. I did n't know you were married till a few weeks ago, you know. I hope he's a good chap, and of course he must be."

He said it all in a rapid, bashful sort of way as if he really valued the moment and had a great deal to crowd into it, yet did not wish to bother her.

"Do you think this a place," she retorted with glittering eyes, "where a woman would be apt to come with a good husband?"

She saw his glance appraise somewhat anxiously her nudity, her rouge, her jewels, her Oriental costume. For the first time there was emotion in his face, and he bit his lip — hard.

"Oh, well," he said, embarrassed, "I don't know, of course —"

"No," she continued, rising and the color now in her cheeks overwhelmed even the artificial tint, burning it off. She had made up her mind, as the boys say, to "soak it to him," this man who seemed not to have been even scorched by the fire he had kindled, which had so consumed her. "No, I came here with another" (she tossed her head toward Herman with a gesture which would have been stagey had it not been so terribly sincere), "my *cher ami* — for which we have no word — lover if you like — only we don't love. Is n't that peculiar? But is n't it modern? — One has to have excitement, after all." Her voice almost broke, but she cleared it and went on, hard and clear, "Am I not coarse? Am I not amusing?"

He looked down at her, standing tall and straight, dumfounded, his face quivering and pale.

"You're going?"

"Yes, I'm going. Are you?"

"I'm leaving to-morrow for Canada. I've enlisted in one of the regiments about to depart. I'm

glad to have had this glimpse," he added perfunctorily.

"So am I," she returned, moving away, not looking at him again; and she called in a shrill tone that did not seem her own, "Herman, I'm going home."

As she appeared in the door Dorothy and Percy pounced upon her, indignant at the desertion and also clamorous to leave. Herman extricated himself from the others in a state now of sulky inebriation. All the glory of his fire had gone. He looked like a mountebank in his bedraggled gauds. The early glimmer of dawn beginning to sift into the place added to the sense of flatness. They turned to join the exodus of the satiated crowd, and Donald Craig, who alone of his group could concentrate on their departure, bowed politely and sat down.

CHAPTER XVII

"JANET, please call up somebody for me? Here's the name. Mrs. Edward Morse, Newton 1657. She's the head of that branch. Some of their work is coming in below the standard. She'll have to be told."

"I suppose so," said Janet resignedly.

She pulled out two of the pinkish pegs in the keyboard before her and stuck them into two other holes. Then she leaned her chin on her hand and waited for the call to go through, wearily bending her brow encircled with the usual telephone operator's headstall.

Mary Ethridge, who had issued the directions, passed on blonde and brisk, supervising the work in the big room where thirty or forty women were cutting raw cotton goods, opening, examining, and remaking packages of bandages, gauze sponges, and other surgical provisions, or stamping them, or packing them up in great bales. Some too were busy at typewriters while others dictated. The women were of every age, but mostly of fashionable appearance. Some wore great earrings and others strings of pearls. They all talked while they worked. From the street outside a crowd peered idly in through the window, its interest divided between their activities, the well-known names it supposed them to bear, and the nearer attractions

in the shape of posters and war trophies dangling in the foreground.

Janet got her call, managed to reprove the Newton lady without hurting her feelings, and relapsed into weary inactivity until the next order should come.

She always felt tired now. Her superb constitution had failed. It was December, and she had been more than tired, exhausted, since that evening at the Rockwood Inn, that distressing encounter. Why had Donald Craig been permitted to come back just then? Why not have remained the ghost she had laid? What a life, to be so forever haunted! — Yet, if he had not come — In the cold light of day the narrowness of that escape could hardly be contemplated. But it had shut the door, that chance meeting, forever on the Herman Duer affair. His few subsequent, tentative advances had been relentlessly rebuffed. He had consoled himself. But what had remained? — She had managed to go through the required motions, had moved the family back to Wyndham and later to town, where they had now bought a large house on Beacon Hill, then had furnished the house as Osborne desired in order to entertain his colleagues and constituents. Mrs. Slade and Amelia also had been brought to their roof-tree and their former residence rented. Financial contractions through the bankruptcy of railroads had hampered the ladies more and more. More of this was now left to her, with Osborne's politics. But it had all been hard to do. It had taken

all her fortitude. Her nerves had become like elastic pulled out thin. Would it break or rebound? No enthusiasm anyway remained, and she said to herself, whenever there was time for thought, that her life was burnt to cinders.

After the new house had become settled and Augustus placed in a satisfactory school, too many opportunities for reflection had come. The universal activity for the war sufferers among the people one knew offered a logical distraction for her also. Nor was it only her personal need for a resource, the usual impulse for untalented women to engage in philanthropy, but she could honestly claim a growing sympathy with those who seemed to be giving all they had, even their lives, to help solve, as far as modern-day Ethics can see, the bloody problems of Civilization. Truth to tell, a more romantic reason also urged her steps every day to the noisy workroom and the uncongenial telephone desk. Her heart, so continually declared to be shriveled and dry, eagerly pictured the daily scenes of preparation for the same cause that must also absorb Donald, — the unimaginable peril he would have to face, — perhaps the ultimate sacrifice. She loved to think that he and she were coworkers, even if he could not know and the ocean lay between. From this aspect every more difficult day and every increase in exhaustion seemed secretly a cause for congratulation, a share in his heroism.

But by the time that the Christmas preparations

were in full blast, simplified though they were this year by the ostentatious bargains among friends for the War's sake not to exchange presents, a plan, which at first seemed preposterous, but which began to assume practicability, was dangling insistently before her mind.

It had suggested itself in rather an incidental way. She had spent the afternoon at a melodrama called "The War Brides" with Elsie Garder, who as ardent suffragist and advocate of peace had helped stage it (lest the cause of women be forgotten amid the smoke of battle) and had persuaded Janet to go. Afterwards they stopped for tea at the studio of an old friend of Elsie's, a miniature-painter named Alicia Mills, just "discovered" by Society. Janet had entered the bare, square room which the young artist was not yet able to furnish, with some embarrassment, but found a modest, smiling young person, — and, on the couch, the only comfortable resting-place, Virginia Higbee extended.

The play was discussed while they sat in a row like birds on a rail, drinking weak tea, flavored with bits of swimming lemon, from a chipped Japanese pot. It brought back those careless, unfastidious student-days of which Janet had once had a glimpse, those wonderful free discussions. She felt momentarily youthful, cheered, receptive, — also amused at Virginia's scenting out this hitherto obscure genius.

"Well," Virginia suddenly announced, with her

bland, engaging, yet conventional smile, "whatever you girls say, the show appealed to me . . . only, it made me shudder — because, you know, I'm going over!"

"What do you mean?" Janet asked.

"Yes," said Virginia importantly. "I'm going over for hospital work, to nurse the wounded."

"That's very fine of you, I think," declared Miss Mills. But Janet surveyed Virginia in astonishment, while Elsie's quick eye darted from one to the other.

Janet, contemplating the pink-and-white spoiled beauty, always dependent on a maid's services, tried to see her helpful in scenes of suffering and death — but imagination failed. She gave it up with a laugh which she tried to prevent from seeming unkind.

"How will you like the nurse's uniform, Ginny? Over there, according to the pictures, their caps are horrors and fit down tight, you know."

"If the Grand Duchess Olga Semlinov can wear one, I can," Virginia, who had a taste for royalty, returned placidly. "Besides, I have a good nose. I don't need to show my hair so's to divert attention from it."

She spoke quite seriously, but they all laughed now. Nevertheless, she enjoyed the stir she had created and answered their many questions with complacence.

"I know you girls are thinking that they won't have any use for me," she said, inspecting her highly polished nails, "but at least I can sweep and dust.

I'm awfully particular about how Bertha keeps my room. And I love the sick, — they seem so interesting and helpless and grateful, — except old people, of course, when it's a bore, because they're set and grumpy. But there can't be any old ones at the front, I suppose, and don't you think soldiers who've actually been fighting and got real wounds must be romantic? I've heard it said we don't know what reality is over here. And when the man whose bed you're making may actually be a spy with plans and secrets locked up in his head right within your hand's reach! Why, it will be like taking a part in 'Secret Service' and I shall look for trouble all the time."

"You may get it if you go in that spirit," Elsie Garder interposed dryly. She had acquired some of the acerbity often produced in imaginative mentalities by grim domestic routine.

"More likely an officer for a husband," dropped the artist, mildly mischievous, tidying her tea-table. "They say that sort of thing's happening all the time."

This careless remark seemed to strike Virginia, who returned with all seriousness, — "Yes, the War has done a lot for single women. It has widened their matrimonial field."

Janet, chiefly interested in the fact that Virginia, with her lackadaisical characteristics, should really have managed to find a place for herself among the imperative scenes of war, also that her plans should

seem so calmly completed, now remembered that Virginia's sister, the Marquise de Pégourd, was prominent, according to the "picture papers," in the relief service in France. The recollection of the then Clara Higbee, whom she had seen a few times as a girl, pinker and whiter even than Virginia, and, she had heard, equally spoiled, sprang to mind. Frequently since then she had encountered her picture, usually in a hat with ribbons tied beneath the chin and a Pekinese tucked under her arm.

"I suppose you'll stay with Madame de Pégourd," she remarked, following up the thought, "and work with her."

"Yes — at first," said Virginia. — "But, if she has n't enough for me to do I expect to gravitate to the Riviera. Many hotels and villas are turned into hospitals there, and of course it's more out of the way for the French and English women, — so they want all kinds of help, Clara says, — and once out of the U.S.A., I don't see that it matters where they stick me."

"Take me with you," Janet suggested in a flash.

"Oh, if you *would* come, it would be too wonderful!" Virginia cried, squeezing Janet's hand in her warm, soft palm. "Clara would be enchanted. I hate to go alone, with all these mines and submarines. They say the Germans don't care a cent about the American flag."

"Oh, of course I could n't," Janet retracted. "Just

a crazy idea. Just the thought of the interest and the change was tempting."

"I don't see why you don't," Elsie here broke in. "There's no real reason why you should n't."

Elsie, for all the vicissitudes of their friendship, had remained at bottom Janet's *fidus Achates*. She was one of those happy or unhappy souls, Janet now ruefully recognized, who pick out certain friends for a pedestal, however undeserved. Janet's welfare and happiness were vital to her. With the penetration that was always slightly annoying, she had spoken several times lately of her friend's ill appearance, and sought enlightenment.

"How can you leave your parents, Virginia?" Janet asked.

"Oh, mamma never minds," drawled Virginia.

The sentence was perhaps an epitome of her whole education. Janet saw the acquiescent, busy little woman who had subordinated herself to the two exotic blooms she had produced. Virginia did n't think it worth while to mention her father (whence the good looks came), whose existence began and ended at his club.

"I really wish you would go," Elsie later urged, while they approached Massachusetts Avenue on foot, and the necessity of her car. (Janet had banished her motor for the exercise's sake.) "It need only be for a few months — if you have scruples —"

"I have no scruples."

"Well — on Augustus's account?"

"I said I have no scruples. Gussie does n't need me. Every hour of his day is filled. He has too many adults, if anything, buzzing about." Janet was wistful on the subject.

"Well, then, —"

"It is n't a thing to decide in a hurry. At present it seems unthinkable. Then, too, though I don't stickle much about things, there 's something new in making an adventure of such a thing as war. Just as much could be done for the Cause at home." Candor even now, when Janet felt that she had repudiated most virtues, modesty, honor, reverence, — candor still clung. "The idea of dipping into death for a lark!"

"We need adventure, though, we Americans," Elsie said, stopping at the white post, and her gray eyes, now marred by crows' feet, looked at the street with its dikes of dirty snow as if they contemplated fair corners of the earth that she would never see. Sometimes the wives of those servants of mankind, so conveniently supposed to be above the taint of filthy lucre, in the intervals of their housework, dare to dream.

"We need adventure to learn things. American women are the real adventurers and explorers of to-day," she added before they parted, with a wan smile and a deeper meaning.

When Janet entered her own house she found Osborne, already in a dinner-coat, and Amelia, very

striking and stately, in furs, drawing off her gloves as if she also had just come in, conferring in the handsome library, furnished in new, rich stuffs. The lamps of the short winter afternoon threw into high relief the tall, unusual-looking pair. Both were standing as if their meeting were fortuitous and momentary — yet Janet often found them together now.

"You going out, Osborne?" she murmured, pleasant if cold, about to pass and ascend to the next floor. Ceremony in the Slade household, when the senior lady was not present, had dwindled to the vanishing-point.

"Yes, he's going to Worcester, to an important dinner," explained Amelia, stepping forward.

"Oh," said Janet, about to move on. She was ineffably weary of the "important" things that Osborne was engaged in.

"An important committee meeting," Amelia reiterated. "The Governor's going to take him in his car — because it's such an icy night."

Janet saw that there was something in the wind about which she was supposed to become concerned. She advanced to the blazing fire and held out her hand from which the rings flashed back the light.

"It is pretty cold," she said indifferently.

She was dimly aware that the brother and sister exchanged glances. What were they driving at, then? She contemplated her husband for the first time in weeks. His existence, except superficially,

had become so blank for her that he seemed more remote than a stranger. Of the development of the Miriam Lansing affair she was ignorant. Whether there was any real guilt involved, whether he was still ensnared, — or repentant, — she was indifferent. When her illusion concerning him had been killed, he had simply, for her, ceased to be; and her subsequent experiences had still further annihilated him. Yet it appeared, from desultory evidence, that he was doing rather well in this political business. One or two nice things had reached her dulled ears. Was it possible, at his age, that he was turning over a new leaf?

At the present moment he most resembled a big, unhappy schoolboy, for all the rapid encroachments of middle age, — while his sister did the talking for him.

"It would seem, with Osborne's position, as if he ought to have his own car," Amelia finally enunciated.

"But has n't he?" asked Janet, puzzled.

"Only the open Packard on the nights you are out — nearly every night," Amelia returned, but very suavely, very simply. "Osborne's getting on, you know." She made the remark with a touch of archness which was a failure. "Don't you really think he ought to have his own limousine?"

"Why, of course he ought to have his own limousine," Janet returned with a laugh.

She passed on up to her room, coldly amused at the

little conspiracy, the dubious device. So that was her husband, her man, her better half, — who could plot with his sister to extract a favor from the wife he had insulted! So that was her hold upon him — purse-strings! But she was incapable now of emotion toward Osborne, incapable even of giving him much thought.

She went in to see her boy and confer with him on the Christmas present question. Except for him how could life be endured?

Meanwhile the idea so frivolously sown that afternoon began seriously to germinate.

CHAPTER XVIII

The Venetian blinds of the Villa Beau Séjour rattled and struggled with the mistral which came buffeting over the violet Esterelles, over the blue Mediterranean. It had become one of the things one could count upon, that mistral, — nor'wester in good Yankee parlance, — in a life of many chances. It came every noontime, at first like a mere whisper, wooing surreptitiously the idle sails of the fishermen at the quays, uneasy folk now with all the new dangers lurking in the deep; then it would slap the pellucid water into ridges and finally churn it into a turgid purple where the sand of the shallows whirled.

The water's agitation on these fervent afternoons could, however, only be observed by Janet when it happened to be her time off duty, when she walked to the *plage* and along the Boulevard La Croisette, vigorously, breathing deep. From her window the outlook was over gray olive groves separating vast fields of flowers, the supply of Parisian perfumeries, away to the distant Alps raising white hoods against a turquoise sky. Immediately below was the terrace where palms waved heavy frongs, and farther down two tortuous, old eucalyptus trees, filling the air with balm. One must twist his neck to get a glimpse of the red roofs of the town, the old Campanile, the

winding Cornice, and the mountainous peninsula breasting the waves.

It was a godsend, that breeze, even if it penetrated here only in occasional, back-handed gusts. It attempted to dilute an atmosphere forever saturated with odors of antiseptics and anæsthetics. On days when the sun poured down upon the tiled roof with too tropic an intensity, threatening to make the room an oven in the short, fierce hours before the chill of evening, it seemed the only wisp of relief for those figures on the beds.

Those figures on the beds! The three months of her apprenticeship in several different hospitals, whence she had been transferred for the performance of the simple tasks, — a matter of filling in where tired workers needed vacations, — had never inured her to them. In the innumerable hours that she had sat and watched, because skilled persons could not be spared to watch, because such hopeless cases as were assigned to her were not worth expert watching, her mind had to be disciplined to prevent a morbid dwelling upon those silent, shrouded forms. Yesterday they were men, to-day the broken tools of destiny. And what a silence was theirs! They seldom gave a sign of being human. They never called or cried. Opiates played the Angel of Mercy while the dark Shadow hovered. A dull groan, asking for water, was the rarest interruption. The face, momentarily glimpsed, would be wild-eyed and distorted. And the next day

it would be another face. Only a few went down ultimately to that smiling terrace where the bourgainvillæa climbed over the balustrade and left the premises again, for the sake, often, of giving death another shot.

It was really only a few weeks since she had been in this holiday house of the Princess Mavarin, although it had seemed, in spite of the beautiful surroundings, interminably long. Madame de Pégourd had introduced her in Paris to the Princess, another American, had recommended her in fact as one of the amateurs with an artistic touch in nursing, and the collusion of circumstances made it impossible to refuse when the Princess asked. But the remoteness of the place, and the desperate nature of the cases, — for the physician in charge, Émile Gervais, was a specialist in lungs, and received (also for the climate) the gravest chest-wounds, — had made the experience tedious and severe.

Still, it was this sort of thing that she had expected, she told herself in difficult hours. The first weeks after their landing, hers and Virginia's, following a salubrious voyage with an amusing ship's company, had been weeks of diversion rather than weeks of service. In London, — where they joined the titled Clara, "run over from Paris on business," quite a metamorphosed lady apparently, so active in war though formerly so languid in peace, — there had been some pretty "strenuous" social doings. Many

Americans turned up; not the traveling American but the International American, neither Daisy Miller nor Mr. Barnes of New York, but Mr. Rogerson, who had volunteered to sort the mail at the Embassy; young Holworthy, Harvard 1916, whose wealthy parents had permitted him to skip a year at college in order to drive an ambulance Somewhere in France; Mrs. Alden Gray, formerly Posy Seamans, whose husband was attending to the foreign interests of the firm of Yeggs and Drew; alert young John Endicott, representing a beneficent millionaire, investigating the claims of oppressed infants on money squeezed from American child-labor; but principally Mrs. Vivian Blythe and Lady Archie Gordon, recent brides of British officers, who awaited, pathetic but willing to be amused, the news from the front.

The result of these encounters had, of course, been luncheon-parties, theater-parties, and supper-parties, and the element of uncertainty and danger in the air lent a touch of romance to it all which used to be absent. Nobody knew what to-morrow might bring. The imaginative mind dwelt with sensational excitement upon what to-morrow might bring. Newspapers brought tidings of the unsuspected deadliness of the submarine. Zeppelins were occasionally seen far hovering in the ether, unimaginable, perilous fireflies, and there was darkness and fusillade. In the morning one read of casualties. The streets teemed with men who as Tom Jones the Smith or Wyatt the Grocer had

seemed commonplace neighbors, but now, loitering along in khaki, tanned, broadened, and heroic, were worth a second look as the Empire's defenders. Many too, alas! were the mourning citizens. War, unlike any before in its mortal significance, crouched at the threshold, — thrilling indeed to a member of a generation which in her own country was as ignorant of the clash of arms as the virgin forest.

Most unexpected, most stirring thing of all, *he* had come to see her. In all these long, silent times her mind dwelt most on that, remembering their hour together, every detail, as one examines repeatedly the portrait of a beloved face.

She remembered how moved she was when she read the card the boy handed her. When the Marquise, idling on the lounge in a pink Parisian *négligée*, with one of her perpetual home-made cigarettes of black French tobacco, and a yellow-backed novel, demanded who it was, — with a touch of temper too, because they had been "on the go" and wanted an hour's relaxation, — she had answered, "Donald Craig," and felt, to her annoyance, the color mounting.

The Marquise, however, did not observe, extending a white arm from her ruffles with the feminine impulse to see the card for herself.

"Oh, I used to know him," said Clara, loudly yawning. "Red-haired little boy then. — Friend of yours?"

"An old friend," Janet had replied in even tones, "but he has n't been around much these half-dozen years. Business in Alaska and then the Philippines."

"I suppose you'll have to see him then," Clara gaped. "Trust all the wandering Americans to get together over here. The War's their lodestone. But you positively can't receive him in this room, *ma chérie*. A derrick could n't budge me."

The necessity thus arising to meet Donald in the stiff hotel sitting-room, away from inquisitive eyes, was not unwelcome. Janet surveyed herself in the mirror, decided that her hat was rather becoming, and went down in her furs and dark suit, just as she had lunched. She entered the room where he waited more calmly than might have been the case had there been time to reflect.

When, however, he stood suddenly before her, in the unanticipated uniform, physically imposing as always, especially so in this cloth of service, she was shaken.

She murmured the few commonplaces of greeting, flat and superfluous where a deeper language speaks, and asked him how he had discovered her.

"Oh, they had you in the hotel arrivals," he returned. "I always go through them, with so many passing. I hoped, perhaps, to have the luck to find you. We're on the move so soon."

"When?"

"Day after to-morrow. And time too. They've been

enough weeks licking us into shape. We're tolerable now, if I do say it, — and all aching to be gone."

The fire of his enthusiasm beamed from his face. His eye was kindled with it, and his cheeks, incarnadined with constant exposure as only very fair skin can be, seemed even more flushed as he spoke. Critically as well as ardently she found him the proper picture of a soldier. Like the woman of all history, too, she felt jealous of the Cause that called him, dominating him obviously, the other mistress whom she must not begrudge. If it might be the mere soldiering, as with most men, rather than the Cause, that did not alter the fact of domination. She explained the reason of her own presence near the scene of conflict, her plans for a nearer approach. She accentuated with half-realized emulation her wish to serve the Allies, her detestation of the enemy. Grand! Yet it might be suspected that he could read the personal motive forever in a woman's background.

At least, he involuntarily betrayed the fact that like most men he considered appropriate to women the not impersonal view.

"Is your husband with you?" he inquired.

"Osborne!" she exclaimed. The name was uttered like an expletive, a condensation of scorn and denial. She flung her furs over a chair and walked to the window that gave upon a vague, fog-shrouded street. What years of undivulged experience now separated her from Donald. She knew as well to-day, better than

formerly, their fitness for each other. He seemed the only imaginable human element able to complete life, the other pole of the electrode without whom all continuance was broken. She was unspeakably happy in his mere presence. Yet all the years stood irrevocably between, all the changes, all the knowledge, the ignorance of each. Where once they had moved in close alignment, hand even clasped in hand, now it seemed as if she remained far behind, so far that the loudest call must be vain. Did he remember that scene at the Rockwood Inn? Had not that betrayed her to him, her retrogression? He had asked her then, too, about her husband.

What was his attitude, then, toward her now? Was there a remnant of the old feeling, or did men always, supposedly more promiscuous, recover? Was it just friendliness? Did he, too, with his imminent, perhaps ultimate, departure, desire some sort of light on the chapters sealed between them, before the perilous future must be met? Did he, in brief, *care?* For the first time a dim idea insidiously invaded her with the suggestion of what life might yet offer if he did. Over here there was liberty and a wide, tempest-driven world where only the elemental passions seemed to count. If he did care, it was their chance.

After a pause he said, "How'd you feel about taking a little stroll? I think the London fog is jolly, myself, — and this is a forlorn room."

"Of course," she responded, twisting the discarded

boa about her neck. It was not a time for hesitation.

They went forth into the strange, indefinite world vanquished by the mist. Except themselves, all shapes, all outlines, whether still or quick, the houses, the signs, the vehicles, the passers-by, all seemed wreathed in unreality. It might have been a London of centuries ago. It might have been the London of the millennium to come. That did n't matter. The huge great hive, seething and swarming, transitory, ancient, portentous, and tragic, was for them a mere setting, mere painted boards. As the outside things were unsubstantial in appearance they were negligible in significance. Only she with her grace, her dark eyes, her vivid face, — only he in the significant uniform, with his smart cane, moved through the blind atmosphere invested with reality.

There was no question of where to turn. Their steps seemed to lead them by intuition through various ways, past fine dwellings in secluded squares, past imposing buildings, along the malls of parks, in among shops where the traffic hurried and toys still baited wealth, — and out again near triumphal monuments, into narrower, tortuous ways where small houses huddled. In the highways of the rich they walked at leisure, almost alone. In the meaner districts there was jostling. But Life elbowed them everywhere. Life peered from high windows. Life teemed in the gutters. For the mere fraction of eternity that was

theirs it was permitted to look upon the Gorgon's face and not be turned to stone.

While they walked he told her in rather shy and abrupt phrases something of his experiences, something of the theme he'd tried to keep the *motif* of his story.

"That first year or two in Alaska," he said, "did me a world of good. It's one of the few primitive places left, and that only in spots. It won't be so long. Men still look each other straight in the eye there and say the truth. Brutality is all aboveboard. It's the brutality of the rifle and the black-jack. It's the brutality of men who have developed themselves in the conflict with great wildernesses, brute force against brute force. Not the silken cord of a plutocratic civilization to insinuate itself about the necks of those already weak! — And the scenery too. — I went in to the Klondike. It's all on the grand scale. Those mountains in their absolute desolation made even an electrician pause and meditate. I began to understand the old Lamas in their Himalayan fastnesses. No wonder they felt themselves close to God. — It was hard work, though, physically, morally. The 'demon rum' gets a good many. He had attractions for me. And the geisha-girl, so to speak, gets even there."

He paused and pressed his lips together looking at her aslant. But she would not look up.

"There's just as much temptation for a raw young

fellow in your desert as in your metropolis. But to withstand it hardens one. That life hardened me. I was lonely, sometimes despairing, but I managed to gain fortitude. One had to refuse to see the black side. One had to insist that the future would be right. Can't get far without that philosophy to start with. Anyhow, I got out of Alaska with a good education. I'd learned some clear things through some pretty fierce times. Two or three hard-and-fast rules got formulated for me. — Then, I'd discovered my limitations. . . ."

As he talked it seemed more and more of a miracle to her that it could be really he, that as they walked prosaically through the street crowd his quiet, well-known voice should really be elucidating the hours of his life which had been lost to her. She felt through his simplicity the phenomenon of his laying bare his heart. Did he then really care?

"Do you remember in Assisi," his voice went on, "how that old fellow Giotto painted up everywhere the guiding principles St. Francis held? Poverty, chastity, obedience? That struck the mediæval saint as the essence of virtuous manhood. Well, in these days of higher education, when we're each inclined to ratiocinate for ourselves a bit, if we depart from the obvious formula a substitute has somehow got to be found. So I went ahead and did a little daubing for myself over the altar of my own cathedral, the pictures I'd thought out. Chastity, all right. I bor-

rowed from Giotto there. Circumstances helped that. Poverty, however, would n't do. Poverty won't go down to-day. I wanted opportunity which Poverty won't give. Besides, material wealth's beside the question. I can't see that it is mixed up with character except as an intensifier. Honor seemed to me to deserve its place. Then Obedience had to come down. Entirely out of date. Obedience is not a virtue nowadays at all. Obedience to what? To an idea? To *whose* idea? Questions those, by the way, all jumbled up in one's duty in this war. Nationality is a crystallized idea. War is a conflict of such ideas. Strange that men should still labor under the delusion that by killing each other those ideas are given a vital blow. No matter how many harmless Germans fall before my ruthless machine gun, the Prussian Idea, alas! will not die. Has n't it probably always been alive anyhow, under different names, the Napoleonic Idea, the Siberian Idea, the Slaveship Idea, the Sweatshop Idea, even the Land-Monopoly Idea? Oppression of man by man? It happens to be particularly melodramatic in its present guise. But is it worse? Has it more victims? Do you think there is any hope of its becoming drowned in this heroic blood? — No; I stamped all over Obedience; and Faith, after some consideration, seemed the only thing to fit in. I found that Faith is indispensable or one would go and commit suicide on the spot."

Janet exulted in the revelation of his thoughts.

She knew that their time together must be short and it might be the only time. She wanted to prolong it. The thoughts themselves were nothing to her now except that they were his. And that meant all. Her mind flitted in bewildered happiness along various associations.

"Dr. Graves had faith," she ventured. "Did you know him?"

"I think so. He was the fellow they made a bishop, was n't he? And commanded to be militant because he was a bachelor? It seems to me they expected him out there in the East, but I don't remember that he ever turned up."

They had reached by this time the bridge that history — and Monet — have made famous, and through the fog becoming lucent with sunset the Parliament towers loomed. They leaned on the parapet and watched the thick water glide beneath.

"I don't believe I meant religion by Faith exactly," Donald said, choosing to take that cue. "Business men steer away from such things, you know. That kind of analysis seems to us beside the mark. Part of old women's lives. Religion somehow implies the Church, any church, and Dr. Fernald. It's the short cut to the goal that legions of us others prefer painfully to reach by our own ways. Church would have impressed me more if it did n't seem inclined to perpetuate and fortify what is. It needs fresh blood if it's to help virility. It needs to strike out strong

against the evils of the day — not court millionaires. It needs to get away from its own politics. Perhaps Dr. Fernald's one who'll do it. There are some. — Spiritual truth faints in the harness of conventionality."

"Dr. Graves won't do it," said Janet with a shake of the head.

"You must know him better than I," he laughed.

"Leave him and tell me more," she urged.

"Well, if it does n't bore you, my trilogy did n't help me in a worldly way."

"What happened?"

"Oh, the more I looked into it the more I found that my bosses, Seeforth and Grafton were trying to put one over on the Government, so to speak. Socialism, if ever, is going to have its day in Alaska. It's the chance there, if anywhere, to work out a society where effort and value shall reap their due reward, where nobody can wallow in privilege not deserved. The railroads are already projected under public ownership there. The land largely belongs to the Government. The soil is ripe for a wise administration to make a big experiment. But it can't be done without a fight. The vultures wait. Seeforth and Grafton, with their efficient secret service, get the news of promising enterprises instanter from the ends of the earth. With their enormous reservoirs of capital, much of which can be dribbled away in mistakes without bothering them, they can afford to take

chances. If, incidentally, their only justification is might, the might of combination, and their ethics as bad as yours, Janet, with your undeserved privilege, it does n't hinder them. If they cannot claim to render to the world services in just proportion to their profits, they step in just the same. They did in this case, through me. It was their purpose to get control of the natural monopolies, the transportation, the telephone, the lighting-system, — then if forced to sell out to the Government, to do so on their own terms. It was a great job for a sharp fellow. A shrewd chap who could guess the trend of development had a gigantic plum there for the firm. But — well — my principles kicked the bucket over for me, that's all. I'd always wanted the thing to come about that the Government seemed after. I could n't see myself helping to cut it out. If Christian at all one must want to give mankind a sporting chance. I would n't stack the cards. — The Company naturally got sore with me, yet were extremely magnanimous. They're as white a set of men as exists to-day, that crowd. I was dispatched to the Philippines instead of cashiered. There's no definite policy yet out there, just a grab-bag with a lot of other plunderers. A new fiber for automobile tires was my particular object. The place reeks with unique and useful plants, you know, and in that I managed to make good. No self-executed pictures to interfere. My pockets were primed, and their vaults — while Harold

Sprague, who took my place at Nome, also made his killing."

She followed the rough outlines presented to her with a tenderness become developed into a great, competent, visualizing power, tremendous in comparison to that frail little passion of girlhood. She followed also the explorations of his soul. Honor had obviously led him from one renunciation to another. Success had come only to mock him with its futility. Easy enough to read the hope of her faithfulness which had been his guiding star. The smallness of her own character, with its stumbling from subterfuge to subterfuge, her final demoralization, seemed in contrast too desolate a spectacle to endure. She blushed at the recollection of the possible sequel that had suggested itself only just now in the hotel. The vows of her marriage would hardly seem light to Donald. The ideals which his life had consistently striven for could hardly be imagined debasing themselves to the yoke of dishonest passion. That he should give himself to the indiscriminate appetite of war, in the prime of his life, part of a sacrifice whose futility he yet tragically saw, now seemed the logical conclusion. And yet, unhappily, there was a living spark, a torment that seared her with its protest that this should be. It was the struggle of the mortal with the immortal, the carnal with the spiritual, Satan with salvation. She could still have fallen shamelessly on her knees and begged him to renounce duty and virtue

and take her with him, anywhere, to any future that meant the fulfillment of their love. The thought of all the time still left that they might be together . . .

Scorn came to her lips, though she expressed it for a subject which hardly mattered.

"Do you think the profit you accuse me of has been of any benefit?"

"No," he said, still interested in his views, as men are. — "The system has been unjust to you too. I don't censure you, Janet, nor any one anywhere whose power, perhaps, has been too great for him to manage. But our only claim to significance, we privileged people, seems to me the fact that we feast while others starve, and ride while others plod along. My dart is aimed at the state of things backing "Society" making power at the present day fortuitous, retroactive, and dangerous. The responsibilities of the rich are beyond human character. They are marooned on islands inaccessible to a true humanity. Why, the only happy rich men are the parvenus, befriended by luck usually, simple souls still so fortunately uneducated that to strut in expensive automobiles, hotel suites, opera boxes, or what-not, brings them pleasure."

"Then, what —?" she thought inaudibly. "Then, — what —?"

The temptation to tell him all that she had suffered and failed to endure beset her, withheld by the doubt of his caring for her still. The discovery he

must have made that night at the Rockwood Inn tormented her. Perhaps the recognition of what she had become had served as a disillusionment.

They wandered from the bridge into the Abbey where the Lares of England hover. In the dimness beneath the Gothic vault they sat quietly on the cane seats set for worshipers. There was no service, but others, many in the King's uniform, many in black, meditated, prostrate before the perpetual glory of the dead. The place and the hour seemed to endow the atmosphere with the mystery of undeciphered portents. The drama of the Empire, of whose spirit this sanctuary was the core, approached the crisis of a violent, undetermined plot. The suggestion of the frailty of human life, the enigma of Fate, the anguished hope for survival, resurrection, victory, pervaded the place, part of, yet ascendant to, the marble monuments and the tattered banners of conflicts long extinct.

As they sat there shoulder to shoulder, alone together among so many presences, as the moments hurried to their final parting, his strength seemed also imparted to her and she began to appreciate the way that he would care.

CHAPTER XIX

"When the war's over you'll have jolly well forgotten all about me."

"See if I do! — I've got your photo, — well, not exactly on my person, but packed away right in the tray of my trunk, under lock and key, just where I can put my hand on it. I'll say good-morning to it every morning and good-night every night."

"You're ragging me. Rather! How many other photos are there alongside?"

"Yours is on top," said the voice of Virginia demurely. "There won't be time to look at the others. I like having something doing all the time, and when this war's done I shall seek out another life-work. Society seems so flat by comparison."

"Give *me* something for remembrance, eh?"

"Well, I have n't a thing."

"Not a sisterly salute?"

"Go along, you naughty boy. You're fresh as paint, as we say at home. I'm not that kind of girl — as a rule. It's a shame we took all that trouble to nurse you well."

Perceiving Janet in the twilight on the terrace above, Virginia giggled.

"You must come in now," she addressed her charge. "It's getting damp."

"Well, go easy, Joan," said the young man.

He rose to his feet with a difficulty plainly exaggerated and leaned his arm on Virginia's shoulder, circling her neck. His slender form was that of a mere boy, but his keen and humorous face was already marked with the shock of terrible experience. Janet knew him to be a promising young sculptor of a famous British name. Although about to be discharged, he would never have his health again.

The pair moved slowly up the steps from the stone bench beneath the eucalyptus trees where they had been resting. Janet could hear their careless conversation and laughter as they slowly approached around the curving way. She smiled at Virginia's methods with her patients, so characteristic, and wondered how many tokens she had exchanged in this dismal caravanserai. She admired, too, her light-hearted viewpoint, so tenacious even here, and recognized the value in the world of undeveloped sensibilities.

Her own spirits, alas! since that day in London when the Truth had been suddenly presented to her vision like a great glass mountain-peak of fairy-tale, inaccessible though blazing in dazzling transparency, had been desolatingly despondent. It seemed to her that she had walked backward all her life and that twice the original distance must now be traversed to reach the goal. The goal seemed devoid of desirability for all its lucent distinctness. Renunciation, the old, old lesson, must be hers, before she could

walk ahead. She must lose her life to find it. And, most of all conditions desperate, the forward journey must be made alone, the only companion having pointed out the way and left her.

Her thoughts always returned to him. She wondered continually what was happening to him. The tragic scenes of her everyday occupation, in which Virginia contrived to find romance, only kept fresh her anxiety for him. But everything seemed to bring him to her. Even now, when Virginia again came into sight with her patient, approaching on the terrace, the vision of the pair advancing entwined and the dark palms standing behind against a sky where a tender crescent swam, brought anguished thoughts of those romantic hours with him that never would be.

"Cyril is going in the morning," said Virginia, panting a little from the effort of mounting under these circumstances. (A brief acquaintance brought her to first names.) "Is n't it a bore? When you've done a good thing they won't leave you your handiwork to admire. I suppose a whole lot of new ones will be landed on us to-morrow."

"To-night, I believe," Janet replied. "At least Sœur Félice said that the 7.10 is expected to drop a carload here and another at Nice. The present Drive has been bad and everything's frightfully full. She's agreed to take in half a dozen specially consigned to Gervais, and to put up some cots. It's harder to stretch in a place like this, of course. As it's time off

for me I'm going to snatch a nap at the Garcias' at the Villa Maggiore. They'd take you in too, Virginia, probably."

"Too long a walk," Virginia objected. "I'll be up most of the night anyhow."

"You girls are angels," Cyril Marvin murmured.

Virginia had deposited him on a bench for another rest and he was fanning himself with his soft hat. The ascent had not been without difficulty for him, either. His artistic eye plainly appraised the two women, so magically become his intimate friends, both different, yet both endowed with a sort of beauty and a sort of charm peculiar to a race all novelty for him.

"By Jove, I fancy there'll be nothing too good for you when the war's done," he rambled on. "Suffrage or what-not, we fellows will hand it over."

"Bring him in. Bring him in," said Janet, entering ahead of them the miniature stucco palace whose lighted windows shone out as even the dusk ebbed away. "'When the war's over,'" she threw over her shoulder. "Everybody's an oracle about that. Let's hope the millennium will really come."

She went up to the little room which had belonged to the housekeeper in the days of the Princess's occupation, and arranged the few belongings that lay about, closing most of them into her trunk, anticipating some need for the place in the rush, and packed a handbag. The only photograph with a

place upon her table was of Augustus clasping a toy sail-boat almost as big as himself, his face exultant with happiness. Sometimes she had felt that if he had been a girl all would have been different. At this moment nothing could have intensified his claim. She kissed the picture as every night, but with indescribable love and longing. There had been lately also the added emotion of uncertainty. Now, in scanning the handsome baby face she felt somehow nearer to the child, more able to contemplate the future of which he must form so vital a part. Even his father, too, even Osborne had loomed more significantly recently in her perspective. In flashes her mind seemed to open to him in the distance. She wondered if her judgment could have been too impetuous. In the change of heart that was coming to her, the confessed determination to seek harmony through righteousness, she seemed to remember efforts on his part that she had balked. She had advanced sufficiently to contemplate a patched existence.

"I must write to Cook's again," she murmured, as she put the photograph into the satchel, "and see whether they have got our passages."

As she went silently in rubber-heeled shoes out into the hall, whose squared parquetry glittered with polish under the lights, a draught swept suddenly through, as if with the opening of a door. It brought the perfume of the garden and the distant sound of some strolling singers' lyric with their plaintive tones

and sweet guitars. As she approached the iron-railed stairway a sinister procession, mounting, confronted her.

Litters were coming up, half a dozen, in file, with bearers and attendants. Their burdens lay covered, immobile as bags of grain, shifting similarly with the irregularity of the journey, heavy and unresisting. One who passed, pallid, with a half-grown beard, smiled, though his eyes were blind. The others were inert, their features buried. They were mere clods. One could not resist the thought of the amount of wasted effort,— these doctors, these trim nurses, this corps of attendants, all a grim farce, for what? The formality it appeared of bearing in these lumps, only, in all probability, to bear them out again to a more permanent resting-place or to limp and stumble about the world.

Behind the line, at the bottom of the stairs, a small group of persons met in evident consultation. There was the doctor, Gervais, short, stout, gesticulative, restlessly thrusting a hand into a trousers-pocket and withdrawing it, or pushing back his hair. There was Sœur Félice, marvelous Frenchwoman, all her life a manager of sick people and well people,— old, very old, therefore relegated to this small, remote house of mercy, to make place at Êtretat, one whispered, for a younger Angéline. There were two young, alert sisters, her subordinates, who waited respectfully. Gervais, Janet knew, being an adherent of the Pope's,

had refused to work with immediate lieutenants of a different persuasion. She had found them all surprisingly liberal and easy as superiors.

A paper passed from the elderly sister's hand to the physician's. He scanned it, muttered, jerked his thumb, wrinkled his brow, waved a flat palm as if he were at least a field-officer amid the smoke of battle. Then he stamped into his office to one side, and the matron with the two others mounted the stairs. Meeting Janet, she asked the reason of the handbag.

"Ah, my dear, I am sorry. We need you with the *nouveaux blessés*," she protested. "Camille is *souffrante*. Mademoiselle de Bru departed, you know, this afternoon."

She passed on with her benign smile and Janet followed, weary and reluctant to brace herself again for what she would have to witness.

There was a large room with a ceiling of azure and walls hung with kakemonos where dragons and great birds watched, and the sacred mountain, — a room still containing elegant Parisian *nouveautés*. It must have served the Princess as a boudoir. Two doors stood open to a balcony from which fresh air swept in. The litters were deposited on the floor at all angles, to avoid the furniture, the common use of the apartment being now a lounge for nurses. Janet always felt annoyed by this little infringement of orderliness. She would have liked to push everything back and arrange the litters in line.

The soiled equipment of the sufferers was being removed, previous to inspection. Already much preliminary work had been done. The deft nurses, the attendants become adept from constant repetition of the same tasks, had stripped off the unspeakable garments and disclosed, except for shreds and swathes, the battered human contents.

Janet stooped and accumulated the nearest pile of clothes and boots. They were damp, rank with filth, loathsome to touch, but it was her job. She took as much as she could carry and descended through the house to a basement where they would be examined and disposed of on the morrow. Then she returned for more.

Dr. Gervais was now in the room bending over one of the patients, while a male attendant of tender years held an electric torch close to the body. It made a vivid yellow circle on the skin except where the wound showed dark.

Another sufferer raised his head as she entered, meeting her gaze with glassy eyes.

"*De l'eau!*" he muttered vaguely, questioningly, as if trying to identify her. But the primal need was in his voice.

She turned to an American water-cooler in the corner, introduced by the Princess, and brought him the water in a paper cup. She noticed that the hair above the bandage encircling his brow was patched with white. It seemed as pathetic to her that he

should be old as it usually seemed that they should be young. He slipped back into his former apathy while the satisfaction of the moment of relief slowly died from his features.

As she passed to recommence her work, Gervais looked up.

"*Voilà!*" he ejaculated with one of his peremptory gestures. "Take Simon's place. Let him do that scavenging."

The assistant put the cylinder in her hand and rose. She knelt beside the doctor as he had done, while the nervous little man selected instruments from the leather case that a nurse on the opposite side of the patient extended. Janet, although sure of her own nerve, diverted her eyes from the gash that quivered and oozed under the probe. The breast itself lay rigid as that of a corpse, for minutes, it seemed, until suddenly a long shudder would convulse it. She hoped that it was a mere involuntary reaction, and that the poor fellow was out of sensation's grasp. His face was hidden under an arm flung over it in an attitude of complete *insouciance.*

"*Nom d'un nom,*" the doctor muttered. "Does this fellow expect to live? What are they thinking of to send such to me — all this distance? Do they imagine that I am Jesus to make the dead walk? . . . It is finished," he went on, rising with a shrug, moved, Janet suspected. "This was a fine figure of a man — one of those great Écossais. — Look at the muscles!

But he has n't a chance unless the miracle of his breathing now be further extended by the sainted grace. It is war! . . . Remove him for the night which he may still survive. The balcony there will do, as the wards are filled. The air can't hurt — may even prolong his wisp of life."

He turned to the nurse and gave directions about administering opiates. "Wash his face," he added, "but don't bother him any more. The fixing-up can be done afterwards."

Janet went for a basin. When she returned the patient was already on a cot on the balcony, covered with a blanket.

The nurse took the basin and the soft cloth out of her hand.

"Uncover his face, please," the nurse said.

The blanket had slipped up above his chin. Janet pulled it down and turned upon the countenance the full glare of the torch, which was intensified out here in the semi-darkness. As she looked she thought her eyes deceived her. She thought that the image continually in her mind had tricked her tired senses. But she looked again and knew that it was Donald. The light wavered in her hand so that the nurse glanced up impatiently.

"You surely don't feel ill now that the wound's covered?" the woman protested.

"I know him!" Janet gasped.

Horror had taken her into its cold arms. She

wanted to rush out wailing into the night. She wanted to bury her head in ashes. Any primitive, violent thing that was active. She could not stand here. Her knees began to crumble.

"I am sorry," the nurse whispered, and finished her task and went.

The muffled activity within the room, the stars, the declining moon, all seemed to wheel and shiver in a confusion of consciousness at whose base the only real perception was the most intolerable pain. She slipped down beside the cot, unable to bear her weight. Her head fell forward close to his. She remained for a long time prostrate beside him.

After a while she became more aware of the realities. The lights within the room had been dimmed. There was silence there. If any were still present they slept the sleep of the just. She was alone with him facing the mountains, barely visible in ghostly outlines, while the light breeze came over the fields of flowers.

She raised her head a little and looked at him. To her surprise his eyes were open, gazing off. Even out here she thought she could detect some of their blueness. His expression was calm, content. Finally, as she gazed she drew his eyes to hers. A spasm shot through them and he cried in hoarse, astonished tones, "Janet!"

He tried instinctively to raise himself and fell back quivering with pain.

"Oh, God!" he cried; "can it really be you, Janet?"

She bent her head while the tears sprang from her eyes and she buried her face, sobbing.

Presently she felt his hand upon her head, softly stroking it.

"Don't mind," the barely articulate voice came. "It's so much better this way. It's so good, it's unbelievable."

She could not speak. She was ashamed because her sobbing shook the bed. She struggled blindly to find something to hold by, to get control. It did not seem to be available in her universe.

"To think, Janet," he went on, "how all these years I've loved you, dreamt and thought of nothing else. Out there I lay for ages beneath the struggle. It did n't seem possible to come out. And here I am, with you . . ."

"You must not talk," she murmured. "It will hurt you."

"I guess I'm past that," he smiled. "Case of short shrift. All got to be chucked too soon to let this hour be spoiled."

Yet the effort hurt him awfully. She could feel how his body crisped with that same tremor. Silence settled over them for a time while her tears flowed unrestrained.

That other night, when they had parted long ago, boy and girl, returned to her. She had waited then

for the declaration that had been fated to come like this!

Tragic as the moment was, it became, as the seconds flew, passionate. That Fate should play such a game with people's lives! She longed to embrace him fiercely, to snatch him back. How could he be taken now?

With fine women the physical test is also in love the spiritual test. She raised her head, weeping as she was, and kissed his hands, his face, the blanket covering his broken body.

"Come," he finally murmured, "darling! The time's so short. There are things I must know that have been troubling me about you."

It was the invitation that she needed. She poured out brokenly to him the perplexities and failures of her life, the loneliness which she had been trying forever in vain to fill, the tangle of her various relationships, the crime that she considered herself guilty of.

He listened dumbly with a face that was white in the moonlight. He pressed her cold hand in his. He closed his eyes at the last of her recital as if that helped his inner vision.

"Things do seem a mess in this world," he blurted out huskily when she had finished. "Misapprehension everywhere. — Futile. — What I and ten million others die for — and you suffer —"

He paused and sucked in his breath in gasps. His

face twitched in the effort to keep it. She felt the cold sweat on his forehead and the dampness of his hand.

"Justice, Truth — What Christ came to show — all the same thing — threshed out again perhaps by all these horrors — the mills of the gods still grinding — The Cross appears there often to people in the trenches — can't be for nothing . . ."

She kissed his brow because she saw the light struggling in his eyes. It flickered like a candle in a wind that may suddenly go out. He seemed by sheer willpower to hold it there, the torch to light the unburdening of his heart.

"Even *I* have seemed to see hovering wings above the smoke. But it's hard to reconcile one's self to the sacrifice that burns. They all go one by one — your friend Graves too . . ."

"Jerome Graves!" she ejaculated.

She felt the tears gushing once more beyond her power to check them.

"The incompleteness of things," she stammered, overwhelmed. "What a waste! That's what one *can't* bear, Donald!"

"The bitterest drops to every one — not only ours," he said, looking at her, nevertheless, with a fortitude that seemed to reach out beyond his words — "not only war — the career of a man who stoops to compromises, — have you thought that? — or the bereavement of women, — children whose promise is

never fulfilled. — But it seems to me now not to matter."

"Not matter!"

"The fulfillment," he said quietly, almost as if he were dreaming.

The night wore on and the moon set, and gradually an indescribable something seemed to imbue the peaks with a mystic effulgence. Much of the time Donald dozed now or woke to smile at her a brave, inspiriting smile. It was strange that though her heart was bursting, somehow courage seemed to be coming to her all the time. Perhaps as his life ebbed that would remain of him for her.

At last she thought she saw, in the indescribable dimness that was not dawn yet was not night, a glaze passing over his eyes.

"Donald," she cried, "come back!" — as if he were really moving away.

His eyes waveringly sought hers again, but the clasp of his hand had become feeble.

"What about me?" she cried; "Donald!" She could not face the woe of such desertion. Having thought only of him hitherto, now suddenly she saw herself left shivering and alone behind.

He stirred and looked strangely about like one who has lost his way. It amazed her to see that he seemed not to suffer.

"You must go home, of course, Janet, and work it

out," he whispered at last. "You'll make good. It helps me to feel that. Harder than this —"

He took her hand and held it against his lips. There was vigor suddenly in his aspect that almost tempted hope. She even thought tremblingly that she detected a flash of surprise in his own glance. He muttered in a kind of exaltation, like one to whom a sudden vision comes, — "Janet, I believe we've not been defeated after all."

THE END

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